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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

JUSTICE IN THE THEATRE OF CAMUS AND DÜRRENMATT:

CALIGULA AND LES JUSTES;

ROMULUS DER GROSSE AND DIE EHE DES HERRN MISSISSIPPI



by

URSULA OTTO

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Justice in the Theatre of Camus and Dürrenmatt: Caligula and Les Justes; Romulus der Grosse and Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi" submitted by Ursula Otto in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

The present study analyzes individually two plays by Camus and two by Dürrenmatt in terms of Justice, such as it appears in the thoughts, sentiments and actions of the characters, in order to bring out independently the nature of each dramatist's concern with Justice and his presentation of it. The final chapter compares the individual works and examines the similarities of the two playwrights' thought. In the conclusion, the "supreme judge" as dramatic type and the "Justice Play" as a distinctive kind of drama, created by Camus and Dürrenmatt, are discussed and related to the post-war European theatre.



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## INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies have been made of the works of both Camus and Dürrenmatt. There are even a number of studies concerning the problem of Justice and Judges in Camus and Dürrenmatt.<sup>1</sup> However, it seems that no comparative study of this question has been made; and while critics of Camus neglect or completely dismiss his dramatic productions, critics of Dürrenmatt seem intent on squeezing all of his plays into the one theory that they are

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Rachel Bepaloff, "Le monde du condamné à mort." Esprit, no. 163 (jan. 1950), 1-26; Donald G. Daviau, "Justice in the Works of Friedrich Dürrenmatt," Kentucky Foreign Language Quarterly, IX (1961), 181-193; Hildegard Emmel, "Fülle der Möglichkeiten: Friedrich Dürrenmatt," in Das Gericht in der deutschen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts (Bern, 1963), pp. 151-168; Carina Gadourek, Les Innocents et les Coupables. Essai d'exégèse de l'oeuvre d'Albert Camus (The Hague, 1963); Agathe Horst, "Albert Camus und das Problem der Schuld," Goetheanum, XXXVII (1958), 18-31; Norbert Kohlhasse, "Gericht und Gerechtigkeit," in Dichtung und politische Moral. Eine Gegenüberstellung von Brecht und Camus (München, 1965), pp. 173-186; Peter J. Reed, "Judges in the Plays of Albert Camus," Modern Drama, V (May 1962), 47-52; Robert F. Roeming, "The Concept of the Judge-Penitent of Albert Camus," in Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, XLVIII (Madison, Wis., 1959), pp. 143-149; Pierre-Henri Simon, "Albert Camus et la Justice," in Théâtre et Destin (Paris, 1959), pp. 191-211; Emily Zants, "Relationship of Judge and Priest in La Peste," French Review, XXXVII (1964), 419-425.







trying to prove. The very intricate dramatic use of Justice in Camus' and Dürrenmatt's plays has never been fully analyzed for any one of their plays and, consequently, neither the significance nor their rich dramatic exploitation of these conflicts have yet been determined.

At first reading, and even more so at first sight, the plays of Camus and Dürrenmatt would appear to be of a very different, even opposite nature. However, at closer view, it becomes evident that the two playwrights have much in common, particularly their attitude toward the theatre as a place of moral and philosophical instruction and, hence, their treatment of the ethical and philosophical problems which underlay the dramatic action of their plays. Indeed, both writers have been accused of creating too intellectual a drama by simply opposing ideas which conflict.<sup>2</sup> This accusation has been, by and large, the reaction to Camus' and Dürrenmatt's plays, particularly to Les Justes and Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi, while Caligula and Romulus der Grosse are usually considered to be somewhat more successful from the dramatic viewpoint, though still immature in their overall composition.

The question for us is then how and why these two writers,

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, John Cruickshank's introduction to Caligula and Cross Purpose (Le Malentendu), (Penguin Plays, 1963) and Christian Mettin, "Das Bild des Menschen im Drama der Gegenwart," Maske und Kothurn, II (1956), 66-73.



among the foremost of contemporary European dramatists, both use Justice, individually and comparatively, in their seemingly different plays. A close analysis of this specific aspect of their plays is an indispensable prerequisite for any opinion or conclusion about the significance that the frequent conflicts of Justice in their works may have for the drama of their respective languages and, indeed, for the entire European theatre.

Since the present study is necessarily limited in scope, the concentration on two plays by each author seemed to be advisable for a thorough inspection. The choice of Caligula and Les Justes might be justified by their representing Camus' first and last dramatic productions (Caligula was written in 1938, first performed in 1945; Les Justes was written in 1949 and first performed the year after); the choice of Romulus der Grosse and Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi by their dating from approximately the same period (1949 and 1952 respectively) and their treating the problem of Justice in a similar setting (Caligula and Romulus) or in similar conflicts (Les Justes and Mississippi).

In the first four chapters, the thesis analyzes the individual plays in terms of Justice. In the fifth chapter, the method of comparison and contrast serves to determine the nature of the similarities, differences and parallels in Camus's and Dürrenmatt's dramatic use of Justice to answer moral and philosophical questions.





## CHAPTER I

### ALBERT CAMUS' CALIGULA

In the following chapter I shall analyze Justice as it appears in Albert Camus' first play, Caligula (written in Algiers, 1938, first performed in Paris, 1945). Since the play does not show a Judgement or trial in the legal sense of the words, the particular character of its judgement will have to be shown in both its origin and function. This means that the personages will have to be characterized, their positions and attitudes defined. Finally, Justice itself will have to be discussed, its character and meaning in relation to its various officers will have to be singled out, and its function in the play determined.

\* \* \*

"Les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux" (I, 4, p.16)<sup>1</sup> such is the Truth that Death revealed to Caligula. When his sister and lover, Drusilla, died, Caligula plunged into a desperate

<sup>1</sup>Albert Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles (Bruges: Gallimard, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 1963), pp. 5-108. This edition has been used for all quotations and references in my text. Roman numerals indicate the act, Arabic numerals the scene in which the quotations are to be found.



search for the meaning of life. After three days, he returned to the palace, convinced that all life is meaningless and that man is in reality absolutely free. He realized that Death can end life at any moment and make all actions appear meaningless. He saw that men are enslaved by the fear of Death, but live without realization of this fear and, as a result, without knowledge of their true freedom. Consequently, he decides to make them aware of Death, to free his people, declaring: "Ils sont privés de la connaissance et il leur manque un professeur qui sache ce dont il parle" (I, 4, p. 16).

Caligula knows that his subjects try to escape the cruelty of Death's hold on life by living in lies and self-deception: "Alors, c'est que tout, autour de moi, est mensonge, et moi, je veux qu'on vive dans la vérité!" (I, 4, p. 16). Therefore he must bring death into their lives and force its recognition; his method of teaching must be destruction; and, being the Roman Emperor, he has the power to destroy all feelings of security, all fixed values and pre-established ideals. The destruction of these social, moral and human values, which he believes false, is necessary to make men realize the omnipresence and omnipotence of Death, the awareness of which is the basic prerequisite for the reign of absolute Freedom. As Caligula puts it: Ce monde est sans importance et qui le reconnaît conquiert sa liberté" (I, 10, p.25); and he continues in messianic terms:





Dans tout l'Empire romain, me voici seul libre . . . Réjouissez-vous, il vous est enfin venu un empereur pour vous enseigner la liberté. Va-t'en Cherea, et toi aussi, Scipion, l'amitié me fait rire. Allez annoncer à Rome que sa liberté lui est enfin rendue et qu'avec elle commence une grande épreuve. (I, 10, p. 25)

In the following scene, Caligula gives us an idea of what this great probation is to be like when he invites his mistress, Caesonia, "à une fête sans mesure, à un procès général, au plus beau des spectacles" (I, 11, p. 28); and the remaining three acts of the play are a faithful illustration of this proclamation. Caligula stages a gigantic play of human life, a festival without bounds, a great probation, and a universal judgement, all in one. However, his play's chief function is or seems to be that of judgement. For, when Caligula calls his spectators, he names them both victims and culprits: "Et il me faut du monde, des spectateurs, des victimes et des coupables" (I, 11, p. 28). In fact his entire audience is made up of people related to justice and jurisdiction: there are culprits, judges, witnesses, accused, but here all are on trial and sentenced to death without a hearing. As Caligula expresses it: "Faites entrer les coupables. Il me faut des coupables. Et ils le sont tous. Je veux qu'on fasse entrer les condamnés à mort. Du public, je veux avoir mon public! Juges, témoins, accusés, tous condamnés d'avance!" (I, 11, p. 28).

Of course, Caligula himself is the supreme judge in his "Last Judgement" spectacle. His plan is to achieve "the Impossible", an



absolute state of existence, by rigorous pursuit of logic. He forces this logic with his imperial power, the convenience of which he only now realizes: "Et justement, j'ai les moyens de les faire vivre dans la vérité" (I, 4, p. 16); or as Cherea sees it: "Sans doute, ce n'est pas la première fois que, chez nous, un homme dispose d'un pouvoir sans limites. . . ." (II, 2, p. 34). Caligula decides whether there will be war or peace. He reveals this power to Scipion when he asks him: "Sais-tu combien de guerres j'ai refusées?" (III, 2, p. 68). Similarly, Caligula has the power to decide about the rights and living conditions of his subjects, including their lifespan and the moment of their death. He is resolved to make use of this power, too, as reveals the project he submits to his intendant:

. . . tous les patriciens, toutes les personnes de l'Empire qui disposent de quelque fortune--petite ou grande, c'est exactement la même chose--doivent obligatoirement déshériter leurs enfants et tester sur l'heure en faveur de l'Etat . . . A raison de nos besoins, nous ferons mourir ces personnages dans l'ordre d'une liste établie arbitrairement. A l'occasion, nous pourrions modifier cet ordre, toujours arbitrairement. Et nous hériterons. (I, 10, pp. 21-22)

Since for Caligula, all life is meaningless, as judge he recognizes no moral or ethical values. Cherea, in his controversy with Caligula, affirms: "Je crois qu'il y a des actions qui sont plus belles que d'autres," to which his emperor replies: "Je crois que toutes sont équivalentes" (III, 6, p. 78-79). Thus Caligula is the supreme judge over all matters in the Roman Empire





and logically, the only one. It does not matter to Caligula whether one person is exiled and another, for the same reason or for no reason at all, sentenced to death. The regulation of his public house is an example for this attitude: ". . . le citoyen qui n'a pas obtenu de décoration au bout de douze mois est exilé ou exécuté" (II, 10, p. 48); and the following remark of recognition, directed to the patricians, is in the same vein: "Vous avez fini par comprendre qu'il n'est pas nécessaire d'avoir fait quelque chose pour mourir" (II, 5, p. 39).

Of course, in his position of power Caligula is not seen as an ordinary judge by his subjects. The patricians complain that he deprives them of their traditional privileges, and they accuse him of being a coward, a cynic, a comedian, an impotent (II, 1, p. 32). And young Scipion believes that his former friend, Caligula, has for some reason changed into a monstrous tyrant. "Oh! le monstre, l'infecte monstre," he cries out in pain during one discussion with Caligula (II, 14, p. 58); and during another debate, on the question of how to equal the gods, he replies with bitterness: "Il suffit de se faire tyran" (III, 2, p. 67). Almost everyone believes that the emperor is insane. Caesonia retorts to Caligula's plan of changing the order of this world: "Mais c'est vouloir s'égaliser aux dieux. Je ne connais pas de pire folie" (I, 11, p. 27). Scipion answers to Caligula's intention of making possible the impossible with the exclamation: "Mais



c'est la récréation d'un fou" (I, 9, p.23). And the third patrician characterizes Caligula for all the others when he says in anger: "Nous le voyons comme il est, le plus insensé des tyrans" (II, 2, p. 34).

However, Cherea, Caligula's worthy opponent, realizes that the emperor is "not mad enough." As he points out to the conspiring patricians: "Les empereurs fous, nous connaissons cela. Mais celui-ci n'est pas assez fou" (II, 2, p. 34). On the contrary, Cherea, is the only one to clearly penetrate the logic of Caligula's game and to recognize that the Romans' only chance to survive his arbitrary judgement consists in putting some "method into their emperor's madness." As he puts it: ". . . laissons continuer Caligula. Poussons-le dans cette voie, au contraire, organisons sa folie" (II, 2, p. 36). Cherea believes Caligula is cruel and selfish (III, 6, p. 77), but he cannot hate him because he thinks that Caligula is unhappy, and he cannot scorn him because Caligula is no coward. In this instance, Cherea approaches very closely the attitude of Caligula's loyal servant Helicon. Helicon, too, holds Caligula for insane, but he also sees that Caligula is suffering inexpressibly. "Oui, je sers un fou," says Helicon in affront to Cherea when declaring his enmity to the chief conspirator, and he ends his declaration by swearing to defend his miserable master, who, Christ-like, "a souffert sans compter, et qui saigne tous les jours de mille nouvelles blessures"





(IV, 6, p. 89-90).

Since Caligula desires to maintain this arbitrary justice, which he has discovered and which men must suffer, by his own logic he himself must suffer; for, if his truth is absolute, he himself can be no exception to it, especially since he insists on the complete equality in meaninglessness of all men's lives. In his first longer talk with Caesonia he confesses:

. . . je savais qu'on pouvait être désespéré mais j'ignorais ce que ce mot voulait dire. Je croyais comme tout le monde que c'était une maladie de l'âme. Mais non, c'est le corps qui souffre. Ma tête me fait mal, ma poitrine, mes membres. J'ai la tête creuse et le coeur soulevé. Et le plus affreux, c'est ce goût dans la bouche. Ni sang, ni fièvre, mais tout à la fois. Il suffit que je remue la langue pour que tout redevienne noir et que les êtres me répugnent. (I, 11, p. 26)

And he ends his speech by pointing out the cause of all these sufferings: "Qu'il est dur, qu'il est amer de devenir homme" (I, 11, p. 26). Being a man and living in the Truth means to Caligula a life of almost unbearable pain. And he soon realizes that this pain will cause others to think him insane, just as Caesonia, after having sworn to obey her beloved master in all parts and to become like him, fears that this will lead her to insanity: "Oui, Caligula," she cries, "mais je deviens folle" (I, 11, p. 29).

Thus, Caligula expects Helicon to think him insane. In their first dialogue, after having expressed his desire for the moon, for the Impossible, Caligula says to Helicon, somewhat



resigned: "Tu penses que je suis fou" (I, 4, p. 15). However, Caligula's own opinion of himself is: "Je ne suis pas fou et même je n'ai jamais été aussi raisonnable" (I, 4, p. 15). To Scipion's reproach that the pursuit of the Impossible is "la récréation d'un fou," Caligula retorts: "Non, Scipion, c'est la vertu d'un empereur" (I, 9, p. 24). Finally, at the end of Act I, Caligula seems to have accepted that, in spite of his endeavours to change the world into the state of his ideal, men are always going to think him insane. The last scene closes with Caligula planted in front of a mirror in the attitude of a madman, showing his reflection to the court and declaring triumphantly his own name: "Caligula" (I, 11, p. 30).

Caligula judges the world, as it is, unsatisfactory. He decides to change it by annihilating all moral values, which mask the truth, prevent men from seeing it, and from living according to it:

. . . lorsque tout sera aplani, l'impossible enfin sur la terre, la lune dans mes mains, alors, peut-être, moi-même je serais transformé et le monde avec moi, alors enfin les hommes ne mourront pas et ils seront heureux. (I, 11, p. 27).

Caligula knows that when he erases moral values, he changes men. As a teacher, he will use and exploit the rules of society, but strictly with logic, in order to destroy the values which these very rules support. As he explains to the intendant:

Si le trésor a de l'importance, alors la vie humaine n'en a pas. Cela est clair. Tous ceux qui pensent





comme toi doivent admettre ce raisonnement et compter leur vie pour rien puisqu'ils tiennent l'argent pour tout. Au demeurant, moi, j'ai décidé d'être logique et puisque j'ai le pouvoir, vous allez voir ce que la logique va vous coûter. . . je rentre dans ton jeu et je joue avec tes cartes. (I, 10, p. 22-23)

After his first brief meeting with Caligula, Helicon had already warned Caesonia:

Caius est un idéaliste, tout le monde le sait. Autant dire qu'il n'a pas encore compris . . . Mais si Caius se met à comprendre, il est capable . . . avec son bon petit coeur, de s'occuper de tout. Et Dieu sait ce que ça nous coûtera. (I, 5, p. 18)

Now Caligula does understand and he starts in earnest to tend to all matters. The use of power is, as Caligula sees it now, that "il donne ses chances à l'impossible" (I, 9, p. 24), and, being an idealist, he feels compelled to take advantage of the opportunity given to him. On the other hand, just like Caesonia, Caligula doubts whether he ought to be happy to live with the new boundless liberty created through suffering and destruction. "Mais je suppose qu'il faut en vivre" is his final resigned statement at the end of scene 9, act I.

From here on, Caligula assumes responsibility for an empire where the Impossible, as the goal of his logic, reigns supreme, above the gods themselves. To Caesonia he explains this ambition: "Ce que je désire de toutes mes forces, aujourd'hui, est au-dessus des dieux. Je prends en charge un royaume, où l'impossible est roi" (I, 11, p. 27). However, "pour quelqu'un qui aime le pouvoir," Caligula explains later to Scipion, "la rivalité des



dieux a quelque chose d'agaçant." And as soon as Caligula faces this rivalry, he finds a way to eliminate his divine adversaries: ". . . il n'y a qu'une façon de s'égalier aux dieux: il suffit d'être aussi cruel qu'eux" (III, 2, p. 67). Thus, cruelty and ruthlessness will be the main characteristics of Caligula himself as well as of his followers. Caligula recognized this aspect of his teaching and judging very early in the play. He asked Caesonia to be cruel and ruthless when she promised her loyalty: "Tu seras cruelle . . . Froide et implacable," but he also knows and prophesies at the same time: "Tu souffriras aussi" (I, 11, p. 29).

The discovery that "les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux" could be answered logically in the idealist Caligula's mind only by using his "pouvoir si étonnant" to change "l'ordre de ce monde." It is precisely because he uses the political power entrusted to him, as emperor, that he, henceforth, seems to be a tyrant. However, his cruelty and ruthlessness serve the absolute Truth and Freedom that will bring about a state in which "les hommes ne mourront pas et [où] ils seront heureux" (I, 11, p. 27). Because of this sacred purpose and because he himself suffers inexpressibly all during his reign of terror (as witness Helicon and Caesonia), Caligula takes on the features of an apostle who spreads his doctrine with fire and sword rather than of a simple egotistic despot. His bleeding wounds and speeches such





as "Ils sont privés de la connaissance" (I, 4, p. 16) recall Christ and his experience. At the end, when he lets Cherea go, even though he knows that Cherea leads a conspiracy against him, and when he simply awaits his death at the hands of the conspirators, Caligula strongly resembles Christ.

Despot, Apostle or Christ-figure, it is certain that Caligula assumes the role of the supreme and unique judge in his empire. "Ce monde, tel qu'il est fait, n'est pas supportable" (I, 4, p. 15) was his first judgement passed on the world. From this initial judgement comes his purpose: "Ma volonté est de le changer" (I, 11, p. 27). He plans to effect this change by transforming life into a judgement-play, in which he himself is director and main performer, namely the sole judge, and in which all of his subjects are the guilty, accused and judged.

Having decided, thus, to hold a universal trial, Caligula calls for his spectators who, like himself, are at the same time his actors: " . . . il me faut du monde, des spectateurs, des victimes et des coupables" (I, 11, p. 28). But in fact, there is no difference in being a spectator, or a victim, or a culprit at this trial, for, as Caligula continues: "Il me faut des coupables. Et ils le sont tous." Even between judges, witnesses, and accused there is no difference when all of mankind is on trial. They are, as Caligula concludes, "tous condamnés d'avance!" (I, 11, p. 28).



For Caligula, the Truth that "les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux" is unbearable; if his subjects pay only lip-service to this truth, "alors, c'est que tout autour de moi [Caligula], est mensonge . . . " (I, 4, p. 16). Now, Caligula explains to Cherea: "Le mensonge n'est jamais innocent" (I, 10, p. 25), suggesting that man's illusions are voluntarily created. Consequently all of his subjects are guilty in his eyes and deserve to be executed. Thus, Caligula states logically in his treaty on execution:

On meurt parce qu'on est coupable. On est coupable parce qu'on est sujet de Caligula. Or, tout le monde est sujet de Caligula. Donc, tout le monde est coupable. D'où il ressort que tout le monde meurt. (II, 9, p. 46-47)

This implacably ruthless reasoning is the basis for all of Caligula's further actions to enforce the Truth; and he is satisfied when his subjects finally realize that he means literally what he says:

Vous avez fini par comprendre qu'il n'est pas nécessaire d'avoir fait quelque chose pour mourir. Soldats je suis contents de vous. (II, 5, p. 39-40)

While for Caligula "ce monde, tel qu'il est fait, n'est pas supportable" (I, 4, p. 15), for Cherea, the only intelligent patrician, it is unbearable to see put into practice the logical consequences of his emperor's conviction that life is meaningless. This feeling justifies Cherea's conspiracy against Caligula: ". . . voir se dissiper le sens de cette vie, disparaître notre





raison d'exister, voilà ce qui est insupportable" (II, 2, p. 34).

Thus Cherea in turn becomes a supreme judge, sitting in judgement of the Emperor himself, as he becomes chief of the conspiracy against him. The other patricians conspire for selfish petty reasons: "Il insulte notre dignité," complains the first patrician; and the old one adds: "Il me ridiculise! A mort!" (II, 1, p. 31). Cherea is well aware of the fact that his conspiracy has for its object something quite different from that of his fellow-conspirators; and, because he does not want their reasons confused with his, he speaks of the difference to them:

Oui, je vais la [la vengeance] partager avec vous.  
Mais comprenez que ce n'est pas pour prendre parti  
de vos petites humiliations. C'est pour lutter  
contre une grande idée dont la victoire signifierait  
la fin du monde. (II, 2, p. 34)

Cherea believes in human values because they embellish and give a sense of security to our lives. "Je crois qu'il y a des actions qui sont plus belles que d'autres" (III, 6, p. 78), he says to Caligula. And he adds that all other ideas are vague and without importance because they hinder the desire to live and to be happy. He explains to Caligula:

J'ai le goût et le besoin de la sécurité. La plupart  
des hommes sont comme moi. Ils sont incapables de vivre  
dans un univers où la pensée la plus bizarre peut en  
une seconde entrer dans la réalité--où la plupart du  
temps, elle y entre, comme un couteau dans un coeur.  
(III, 6, p. 77)

Thus Cherea's final judgement of Caligula sounds like this: "je te juge nuisible" (III, 6, p. 77); "Tu es gênant pour tous. Il





est naturel que tu disparaisses" (III, 6, p. 78).

Cherea and the patricians sentence Caligula to death (Act II, 1 and 2) because he systematically destroys the basis of order in which they live. However, Helicon, Caligula's favourite servant, denies the patricians' right to pass judgement on his master precisely because they are simply trying to keep up the secure old order. "Vous, des juges?" Helicon jeers at Cherea and the other conspirators, "Vous qui tenez boutique de vertu, qui rêvez de sécurité comme la jeune fille rêve d'amour, qui allez pourtant mourir dans l'effroi sans même savoir que vous avez menti toute votre vie." And he concludes that he will defend to the death his crazy master "contre vos nobles mensonges, vos bouches parjures . . ." (III, 6, p. 90). Helicon considers Caligula insane, but his suffering causes Helicon to feel pity and to protect him from the false justice of the patricians, whom he judges to be hypocrites.

The Play is one of judgement and counter-judgement. As emperor, Caligula has absolute power and uses this power to judge and condemn everyone. His subjects, in turn, judge that they have to make use of the only possible recourse to oppose their own, unpredictable condemnation: they must conspire and kill Caligula. And finally, the conspirators are judged hypocrites by Caligula's servant Helicon, who also judges hypocrisy inferior to Caligula's honest and painful madness. Thus there



are at least three parties to judge in this play. It is not too surprising then that the different parties pass judgement related to three different aspects of Justice.

The Justice practised by Caligula is of two-fold origin, one idealistic, the other practical. The practical basis to exercise justice had been given to Caligula with his office as emperor; but his discovery of the Truth and his resulting ideal were prerequisites to the consequent use of his judicial power.

This two-folded origin of Caligula's Justice is reflected in his descriptions of it. Talking about his ideal, he uses frequently words of ethical and philosophical connotation, like "Truth," "Lies" and "Innocence," while negative terms such as "Guilt," "Condemnation," and "Execution" dominate his discourse on Justice in its legal aspect. Some terms, however, Caligula uses deliberately on both levels at the same time, which is natural enough since he decided to make use of the empire's apparatus of Justice in order to materialize his personal ideal.

When we look upon Caligula as the legal, supreme judge of the Roman Empire, the justice which he practises can only appear as his own despotic means to a totalitarian end. For who among his subjects would guess that the law demanding statewide disinheritance as well as the progressive execution of the entire population would serve any other end than Caligula's personal enrichment? And the same explanation of Caligula's method would







appear to apply to the regulation of his public house.

Thus, Caligula's Justice must seem militant. It certainly is amoral, for it does not respect anyone or anything. Caligula's Justice has the power, and makes use of it, to put people and institutions on trial for any reason or no reason at all, even to condemn and execute without trial. And since Caligula is eager to establish the order of "his justice" in every domain of life, all of his subjects experience, perforce, its arbitrary, humiliating, and destructive character.

By passing the law of obligatory disinheritance, Caligula tears down the traditional rights of families at the same time as their public rights, since no difference is made between patricians and other families. With the law which calls for the execution of all subjects in an arbitrary order, Caligula attacks the most fundamental law of nature: natural death; and his decree arbitrarily ordering famine for the next day, serves the same purpose. Artistic life as well is violated when Caligula performs a ridiculous dance and orders the life-or-death alternative to admire the dance as great art. He even goes so far as to tyrannize the creative process in poets by organizing an impromptu poetry contest. Finally, Caligula desanctifies religious life by forcing his subjects to adore him as the goddess of love, Venus.

Most of the patricians consider Caligula's interference with their life and liberty simply as the result of his having become



a tyrant: "Nous le voyons comme il est, le plus insensé des tyrans!" (II, 2, p. 34). Only Cherea is aware of the fact that Caligula's injustice is of secondary importance as long as it is considered the result of tyrannical ambition and power, even though his injustice means death for them. "Cela est secondaire," Cherea argues, "mais il met son pouvoir au service d'une passion plus haute et plus mortelle, il nous menace dans ce que nous avons de plus profond" (II, 2, p. 34). He sees accurately the dehumanizing nature of Caligula's ideal, its imperative desire to transform by denying the human identity which they derive from their moral and ethical beliefs. Cherea explains, too, the origin of this lofty and deadly passion of Caligula as well as his own reason for opposing it:

C'est pour lutter contre une grande idée dont la victoire signifierait la fin du monde. Je puis admettre que vous soyez tournés en dérision, je ne puis accepter que Caligula fasse ce qu'il rêve de faire. Il transforme sa philosophie en cadavres et, pour notre malheur, c'est une philosophie sans objections. (II, 2, p. 34-35)

Cherea is then the only one to recognize the underlying idealistic basis of his emperor's misuse of judicial power.

Since Caligula's philosophy has as its sole premise and main characteristic the omnipresence and omnipotence of Death, the justice that he puts in the service of this philosophy assumes just as totalitarian an appearance as justice in the service of a totalitarian state. Arbitrary action must necessarily be-





come a vital part of Caligula's ideologically used justice, for his philosophy also denies the right to evaluate morally any action or any thing. Thus, the core and aim of Caligula's philosophy affirm "NOTHINGNESS" and, consequently, his actions to attain his ideal must be nihilistic. Since this ideal is universal and totalitarian, its means must be those of limitless nihilism.

Caligula is a nihilistic idealist, who has seen in the use of absolute logic a possible way to attain his impossible ideal. As he suggests in his first dialogue with Helicon, "il suffit peut-être de rester logique jusqu'à la fin" (I, 4, p. 16). And this is what he does throughout the play. This is what makes his Justice become inhuman, and by humane standards, unjust. The instruments of justice are only a means exploited by Caligula to enforce his Truth. And since that Truth holds life as meaningless, one act must be inherently as good as another and everyone of Caligula's acts must be, logically, as just and as good as the other. Thus, Caligula can make the following rigorous statement about execution: "L'exécution soulage et délivre. Elle est universelle, fortifiante et juste dans ses applications comme dans ses intentions." (II, 9, p. 46)

In order to make his subjects live in the Truth, in order to show and teach them the Truth, Caligula decides to direct their future life in the manner of a didactic play. In this spectacle, in which he uses his subjects simultaneously as actors and spec-





tators, in his attempt to teach them through experience, his only directive is rigorous logic in arbitrary action applied to the current social rules. As Caligula reveals to the intendant: ". . . je rentre dans ton jeu et je joue avec tes cartes" (I, 8, p. 23). His logic's framework of application comes from the forms of "their" Justice. However, if pursued with ruthless logic, this Justice turns into Injustice, as shown above. Thus, Caligula's "play" takes on characteristics of a travesty. Moreover, because of Caligula's own messianic character as well as his explicit intention to pass his subjects through a practical course in "living in the Truth," his play has even something of an enforced religious conversion or a crusade. Still, the entire project has something rather personal about it. After all, Caligula proclaims, at the beginning, his desire for the Impossible, the reign of absolute Freedom. However, he knows: "On est toujours libre au dépens de quelqu'un" (II, 9, p. 46). His play and use of Justice really serve only to materialize his own experiment in creating a state of absolute Freedom. His outcry of despair, toward the end of Act II, testifies to his experimental intention: "Tu avais décidé d'être logique, idiot. Il s'agit seulement de savoir jusqu'où cela ira (III, 5, p. 75).

To Caligula's subjects, however, Justice is based on moral limits, distinction and values. As Caesonia affirms, before she takes her oath of loyalty: "Il y a le bon et le mauvais, ce qui



est grand et ce qui est bas, le juste et l'injuste" (I, 11, p. 27). Among the conspirators, the first patrician makes himself speaker for all the others when remarking: ". . . les bases de notre société sont ébranlées . . . la question est avant tout morale . . . la vertu nous appelle à son secours" (II, 2, p. 35). It is true that the conspiring patricians act primarily for selfish and vain reasons. Caligula, Helicon, and even Cherea are aware of this motivation. Helicon goes so far as to include Cherea in the circle of "liars" and hypocrites whom he accuses: "Vous . . . tenez boutique de vertu" (IV, 6, p. 89). Still, Cherea is the only patrician who recognizes that Caligula's injustices result from a "deadly passion" or "un lyrisme inhumain" (II, 2, p. 35) as he calls it. Cherea knows that Caligula's dream is to transform the universe so that literally anything and everything becomes possible. As he describes it, it is the dream of "un univers où la pensée la plus bizarre peut en une seconde entrer dans la réalité--où, la plupart du temps, elle y entre, comme un couteau dans le coeur" (IV, 6, p. 77).

Of course, any feeling of security in such a universe is completely out of the question--which is precisely what Caligula wants, since living in security to him means the same as living in error and illusion. For Cherea, however, as well as for the majority of people, a reasonable amount of security is necessary for life; and, normally, it is the system of Justice in a state







that assures this security for its population. But Caligula, the idealist, regards everything, Truth, Justice, Logic, in an absolute, ideal way. The absolute Truth for him is that Death is NOTHING and makes everything NOTHING. The logical consequence thereof is that Justice is NOTHING and therefore akin to Death. In practice, the logical consequence is that Caligula, too, must die. The failure of his experiment is shown ironically in that his last moments of life are characterized by the same fears that he had seen in his victims. Hearing the conspirators approach, he confesses in his last monologue: "J'ai peur. Quel dégoût, après avoir méprisé les autres, de se sentir la même lâcheté dans l'âme . . . " (IV 14, p. 107).



## CHAPTER II

### ALBERT CAMUS' LES JUSTES

In Les Justes, Albert Camus' last dramatic creation (1950), Justice, as the title indicates, is the concern of a group of people. However, the play is not a law-court trial and "les justes" are not members of a jury, but revolutionaries who have condemned the established political system as being unjust and who are now in the act of destroying that system by executing its officers. Their purpose is to build an entirely new state on the principles of absolute Justice. All of these revolutionaries believe that they are forced to kill those who maintain the present state of Injustice, but they experience a grave crisis in their own fraternal organisation when the question of the death of innocent bystanders arises: are "les justes" justified or do they need any justification in sacrificing more human lives than are absolutely necessary for the materialization of their ideal? Kaliayev, the first appointed assassin instinctively balks at the idea of killing two innocent children while carrying out his mission and asks his "brothers" to judge him. In making this judgement, the five "justes" show distinctly different attitudes toward their cause of Justice.





In the following chapter, I shall analyze the individual attitudes toward Justice of the five "justes" and the features of the various utopian states of absolute Justice that they envision.

\* \* \*

"Un juste," according to the definition of Le Petit Larousse Illustré (19th edition, 1964) is a man "qui observe les lois de la morale ou de la religion." Albert Camus' drama shows four men (Boris Annenkov, Stepan Fedorov, Ivan Kaliayev, Alexis Voinov) and one woman (Dora Doulebov) who consider themselves "des justes." These "justes" make up a combat group of the revolutionary socialist party (l'Organisation) in late tzarist Russia. Their "religion" is the Revolution and their "paradise" a state of absolute Justice and equally absolute Freedom. "Nous arriverons à bâtir une Russie libérée du despotisme, une terre de liberté qui finira par recouvrir le monde entier" (II, p. 338)<sup>1</sup> proclaims Stepan. Kaliayev, his brother-in-arms, dreams: "Un temps viendra où il ne sera plus utile de boire où personne n'aura plus honte, ni barine, ni pauvre diable. Nous serons frères et la justice rendra nos coeurs transparents" (IV, p. 361). However, their humanitarian

<sup>1</sup>Albert Camus, Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles (Bruges: Gallimard "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 1963). pp. 301-393. This edition has been used for all quotations and references in my text. Roman numerals indicate the acts of the play which is not divided into scenes.





and utopian vision has no place in the present; like Dora, all feel that they are living in a "monde empoisonné d'injustice" (III, p. 353), where children live "in agony" and the entire population is locked in chains of misery, where men are hanged and beaten to death.

Despotism, the tyranny of the tzarist system, is unanimously condemned by the revolutionaries. For them it is the sole source of injustice, feudalistic slavery and social prejudice. When they understood that "il ne suffisait pas de dénoncer l'injustice," as says Voinov, (I, p. 314), that "il fallait donner sa vie pour la combattre," they drew the uncompromising conclusion: "Il faut tuer le despotisme" (Dora, I, p. 326). Since the archduke Serge, in their eyes, incarnates despotism as well as injustice, their conclusion dictated his assassination.

Finding the tzarist system unjust, "les justes" hasten to pass from condemnation to the execution of their judgement. The assault of the archduke Serge is only the first step in a series of actions designed to free the people and to re-establish Justice. It is this goal that they plan to make known by means of a proclamation following the successful assassination of the archduke:

Toute la Russie saura que le grand-duc Serge a été exécuté à la bombe par le groupe de combat du parti socialiste révolutionnaire pour hâter la libération du peuple russe. La cour impériale apprendra aussi que nous sommes décidés à exercer la terreur jusqu'à ce que la terre soit rendue au peuple. (I, p. 310)



Thus the five "justes" are in full agreement about the intolerable injustice of their present state and the necessity to destroy this state in order to create another, founded on absolute Justice. But, beyond this basic agreement, their views are divergent and even opposed. Because of the dimensions which their destruction may take and because of various possible ways in which their future Justice may reign, the five follow their own, individual sets of moral laws. In radicalism, their different ethical means range from Stepan at the one extreme, through Annenkov and Voinov, to Kaliyev and Dora at the other extreme. It appears most practical to study their individual attitudes in that order.

Stepan Fedorov is the most recent member of the five "justes." He is also the one who has suffered most strongly and personally from the injustices of despotism: on joining the four others in the opening scene of the play, he had just returned from three years of prison and exile in Switzerland. It is therefore not surprising that he especially is filled with hate for the system which made him suffer and that his will to destroy this system takes the appearance of personal revenge. At the moment of greatest suspense, just before they learn of Kaliyev's successful attack, Stepan reveals to Dora his state of mind: "Des années de lutte, l'angoisse, les mouchards, le bagne . . . et pour fini, ceci. (Il montre les marques [du fouet]). Où trouverais-je la force





d'aimer? Il me reste au moins celle de haïr. Cela vaut mieux que de ne rien sentir" (III, p. 357). Hate, then, is the only human emotion of which Stepan is still capable. It is in the same conversation with Dora that he exclaims: "Mais, moi, je n'aime rien et je hais, oui, je hais mes semblables!" (III, p. 356). Consequently, even the love for Justice which he professes in Act I--"Je n'aime pas la vie, mais la justice qui est au-dessus de la vie" (I, p. 320)--even this "love" takes on the features of hate. Since Stepan places Justice above life, Justice, under his guidance will necessarily be inhuman. On the other hand, he believes that the people need the hope of a human Justice. He says: "Quand on leur vole le pain, de quoi vivraient-ils donc, sinon de justice?" (II, p. 339). He is convinced also, that, for those who do not believe in God, the hope of true justice is necessary: "il faut toute la justice ou c'est le désespoir" (III, p. 355).

Hence, for the atheist Stepan, Justice takes the place of God in a monotheistic society; and, as an ardent defender of his faith, the Revolution he sees as a crusade to save ignorant humanity in spite of itself: "Qu'importe si nous l'aimons [la révolution] assez forte pour l'imposer à l'humanité entière et la sauver d'elle même et de son esclavage" (II, p. 336).

Seen from this angle, "l'Organisation" is the germ cell of a crusade for absolute Justice, and the members of this "Organisa-



tion" are nothing but impersonal particles that function only in total abandon to the cause. Consequently, Stepan considers discipline and unquestioning obedience to the "Organisation" as prerequisites for its success. In practice, his attitude means that all members of the "Organisation" have to sacrifice to it and its aims their entire lives as well as their rights to hold personal opinions.

Justice, then, is for Stepan at the same time something above and beyond life and an essentially human concern: ". . . l'orgueil des hommes, leur révolte, l'injustice où ils vivent, celà, c'est notre affaire à tous" (II, p. 338). His pursuit of this ideal takes necessarily the form of an inhuman, nihilistic fanaticism. In the same way that he agrees to any means in combatting the present tyranny of Injustice, he also agrees to the most radical methods for enforcing his Justice. When Kaliayev, faced with the possible assassination of children, finds himself in a moral dilemma, Stepan dismisses his scruples: "Qu'importe que tu ne sois pas un justicier, si justice est faite, même par des assassins" (II, p. 338).

There is no doubt that Stepan believes in the machiavellian principle that the cause justifies the means. "Rien n'est défendu de ce qui peut servir notre cause," he declares in opposition to his fellow-revolutionaries' hesitation to kill children or to be double agents for the party's sake. Since Justice is





the only Truth recognized by Stepan, and since his recognition of this Truth, absolute for him, includes the ideal of absolute Freedom, he himself feels absolutely free in pursuing this Truth; such a pursuit of Justice in an unjust, totalitarian state must follow the path of revolution and destruction. Consequently, for Stepan, "il n'y a pas de limites" (II, p. 338) in destruction. It is this view which estranges Stepan from the other members of the combat group as well as from the officers of despotism.

On this very point, Boris Annenkov, head of the revolutionary group, sharply reproves Stepan: ". . . quelles que soient tes raisons, je ne puis te laisser dire que tout est permis. Des centaines de nos frères sont morts pour qu'on sache que tout n'est pas permis" (II, p. 337). As much as Stepan, Annenkov believes that "la Russie entière est en prison" and that revolution and terror are necessary in order to "faire voler ses murs en éclats" (II, p. 385). Discipline and the sacrifice of one's private life for the sake of the Revolution's goal appear to be of the same importance to him as to Stepan. However, he recalls with regret his life previous to his engagement in the Revolution. "Sais-tu que je regrette les jours d'autrefois, la vie brillante, les femmes . . ." (II, p. 328), he discloses to Dora when she tells him of her own fears. Hence, even though he gave up his private life, Boris Annenkov did not become incapable of human feeling; he still has a sense of honor and shame. Therefore,



unlike Stepan, he does not insist on blind obedience when Kaliayev hesitates to kill the archduke's niece and nephew; and he covers Voinov's retreat even though, by doing so, he exposes himself to criticism.

Alex Voinov may be the weakest "juste" among the five, but he is the one who suffers most from lack of truthfulness which allows others to live with the injustice of tyranny and which also seems to be inevitable in the life of a revolutionary. The future era to which he looks forward is that day when, as he says, "je ne mentirai plus" (I, p. 314). It is Alexis' extreme moral awareness which makes him temporarily withdraw from his "brothers." He is not afraid of prison or death. Just as well as Annenkov, he knows that "la prison et la potence sont toujours au bout" (III, p. 346), even though he may in the future simply hold an office-job in the Organisation; but he thinks that in such a position he will at least be free of the supreme moral decisions, those which determine the moment ending his life as well as his enemies'. "Ne plus prendre de décision!" he sighs. Thus, Voinov hopes to find redemption from the moral burden which he bears as a terrorist. As a terrorist, he says to Annenkov, he feels that he has to "porter [sa] vie et celle d'un autre à bout de bras et de décider du moment où [il précipitera] ces deux vies dans les flammes" (III, p. 347). Consequently Voinov leaves the combat-group and does not return until he reads Kaliayev's declaration,





in his speech before the tribunal, that he had acted "à la hauteur de la protestation humaine contre la violence" (V, p. 382) and that he offered to pay with his own life in order to re-establish the purity of the Revolution's ideal. Having read this, Voinov was ready at last to make his own decision: "J'ai décidé alors de venir" (V, p. 382). Continuing his self-justification, Alexis explains to Dora how Kaliayev's exemplary moral attitude reassured his own:

J'ai souffert parce que j'ai été lâche. Et puis, j'ai lancé la bombe à Tiflis. Maintenant, je ne suis pas différent de Yanek. Quand j'ai appris sa condamnation, je n'ai eu qu'une idée: prendre sa place puisque je n'avais pas pu être à ses côtés (V, p. 382)

For Ivan Kaliayev as well as for Alexis Voinov, the Revolution and, more particularly, the act of terror related to it pose primarily moral problems. However, while Alexis' sense of moral responsibility extends only to taking on the responsibility of another person's life, Yanek, in his search for a way of redemption, goes beyond the bare feeling of responsibility. It is on this point that Stepan and "Yanek" Kaliayev prove to be fundamentally opposed to one another.

Since, for Stepan, the cause justifies the means, no moral complications arise when fighting despotism with despotic means. Stepan's ideal of an absolute Justice, above life itself, and his hatred of life as well as of his fellow-men detach his love for Justice from life and men. For him, the sacrifice of human



life for the ideal becomes an easily accepted necessity.

At the other extreme, Kaliayev entered the Revolution precisely, as he says, "parce que j'aime la vie" (I, p. 320). Consequently, he suffers when he has to inflict injustice or to end a life, be it even "pour bâtir un monde où plus jamais personne ne tuera!" (I, p. 322).

After his first clash with Stepan, Yanek assures Dora: "Pourtant, je crois comme eux à l'idée" (I, p. 322); and he continues: "Comme eux, je veux me sacrifier." However, soon he must realize that his own idea of absolute Justice is not, like Stepan's, "morte", that is completely detached from human life, but that his ideal is one of "justice vivante", Justice that starts in the here and now and that serves humanity. If Stepan is leading some kind of a crusade for a Justice-idol, then Yanek could be said to be leading a war on Injustice. Hence, Kaliayev's readiness for self-sacrifice is in nature and purpose distinctly different from that of Stepan. Stepan sacrifices his life by putting it fully into the service of the Organisation, which means, by abandoning all personal and human feelings and accepting the risks of arrest, punishment and death. Against that idea of service to the ideal stands Kaliayev's idea of deliberately sacrificing one's life to "pay" for the life taken and thereby re-establishing his own innocence as well as the purity of the ideal.

Obviously, for Kaliayev, who confesses "j'aime ceux qui vivent





aujourd'hui sur la même terre que moi" (II, p. 339), and who maintains that honor is "la dernière richesse du pauvre" (II, p. 340), the preservation of human values is of extreme importance. While words like "honor", "shame" and "dignity" occur throughout his arguments, Stepan declares them to be "un luxe réservé à ceux qui ont des calèches" (II, p. 340); and, whereas Stepan openly declares: "Nous sommes des meurtriers et nous avons choisi de l'être" (II, p. 340), Kaliayev insists: "Non. J'ai choisi de mourir pour que le meurtre ne triomphe pas. J'ai choisi d'être innocent" (II, p. 341).

It is Innocence, just as necessary in life for Kaliayev as Justice is for Stepan, which for Kaliayev ensures the reign of Justice. As he, of course, realizes, Stepan's ruthless pursuit of absolute Justice has definite similarities to the Injustice that it fights. "Derrière ce que tu dis," Yanek replies to Stepan, "je vois s'annoncer un despotisme qui, s'il s'installe jamais, fera de moi un assassin alors que j'essaie d'être un justicier" (II, p. 338).

Innocence and Justification are then Kaliayev's main concerns. He reproves Stepan in their very first debate: "Tu ne le [le grand-duc] tueras pas seul ni au nom de rien. Tu le tueras avec nous et au nom du peuple russe. Voilà ta justification" (I, p. 320). From the very outset, Yanek denounces Stepan's tendency to see in terrorism a personal revenge. Together with his claim for



limitless destruction, Stepan's personal hatred must in Kaliayev's eyes end in the total negation of life. To the contrary, Yanek's own reason for joining the revolution originates precisely in his desire to ensure human life and those things that can make it beautiful and happy. It is no wonder that his knowledge that he will take a human life bothers him, even though he feels, like his "brothers", that this putting to death is necessary in order to ensure a decent life for the majority of the people. Still, that is not enough justification for Kaliayev who wants to be "un justicier," "un homme qui aime à faire régner la justice." Nor is there, for him, sufficient justification in the argument which holds the archduke as the incarnation of injustice and which claims the bomb is thrown not at a human being, but at despotism. In terms of the definition of a "justicier," Kaliayev claims "le droit de rendre la justice sur ses terres," and, since he believes that the Russian soil belongs to all of the Russian people, he feels entitled and obliged to administer Justice. But he also knows that he can practise true justice only if he submits himself as well to its laws. Therefore, he wants his own trial and his imprisonment, in order to atone for the homicide that was inevitably linked to his "acte de justice," his attack on despotism in the person of the archduke. On the other hand, since he denies any right or validity to the system of justice to which he voluntarily submits, he may well say to the tribunal: "Vous





pouvez me tuer, non me juger" (IV, p. 367), while to his "brothers" as members of an Organisation of like-minded men, he had earlier said: "Je suis revenu parce que je pensais que je vous devais des comptes, que vous etiez mes seuls juges" (II, p. 333). Before the tribunal, Kaliayev once more underlines his idea of justification through self-sacrifice. Earlier he had said to Dora: "Mourir pour l'idée, c'est la seule façon d'être à la hauteur de l'idée. C'est la justification" (I, p. 323). So before the tribunal he declaims: "Si je me suis trouvé à la hauteur de la protestation humaine contre la violence, que la mort couronne mon oeuvre par la pureté de l'idée" (IV, p. 381).

Thus, finally Kaliayev always assumes the position of the supreme judge of his own actions; and since it is his firm conviction that, by giving his own life, he can atone for any injustice he might do, at one point he even pledges obedience to the Organisation when its directive does not coincide with his attempt to act as a "justicier." But that event is also the only time that Yanek asks his "brothers" to decide for him. "Décidez seulement, j'obéirai à l'Organisation" (II, p. 333), Kaliayev reassures them, after having failed to throw the bomb at an archduke accompanied by his little niece and nephew; but he also adds: "Si vous le décidez, j'irai tout à l'heure à la sortie du théâtre, mais je me jetterai sous les chevaux" (III, p. 340).

Dora Doulebov is the only woman among the "justes." It is



her job to build the bombs required by the group for the executions in its "war on Injustice". Just like the other "justes," Dora firmly believes that "il faut tuer le despotisme" (I, p. 326), but she also realizes that this means "donner la mort" (I, p. 322). Although Dora feels that they are "obligés de tuer" (I, p. 324), she suffers, just like Voinov and Kaliayev, from the awareness that they have to fight despotism and injustice with equally unjust means.

At the time when the combat-group plans its attack on the archduke Serge, Dora has been with the group for three years and producing its bombs for two. Her appearance gives the impression of calmness; however, while awaiting the result of the first attempt on the archduke's life, Dora confesses to Annenkov: "Je ne suis pas calme: j'ai peur. . . . Eh bien, voilà trois ans que j'ai peur, de cette peur qui vous quitte à peine avec le sommeil, et qu'on retrouve fraîche au matin" (II, p. 328). Having dedicated her entire life to the cause of the Revolution, she has even sacrificed her love for it, since "il faut du temps pour aimer", while "les justes", as she feels, have "à peine assez de temps pour la justice" (III, p. 355). Moreover, it is Dora's firm belief that "ceux qui aiment vraiment la justice, n'ont pas droit à l'amour" (III, p. 351). Thus, Dora, too, feels that all individual, human feelings and rights must be sacrificed for the sake of the absolute ideal, which in her case as in Kaliayev's is the salvation





of all mankind. Still, she will not or cannot forget these human emotions. Rather, she tries to fuse them with her concern for the people, the beneficiaries of all their endeavors and deprivations.

But even the sacrifice of private life, happiness, and personal feelings for the sake of their revolutionary goal, does not completely justify, in the eyes of Dora, the use of unjust means in its pursuit. Like Kaliayev, and even more so, she believes that "les justes" have to pay with their own lives for the lives that they take. The fundamentally moral aspect of her calculation becomes even more obvious when Dora suggests to Kaliayev, whom she loves, that "un bonheur encore plus grand" would be to go "vers l'attentat et puis vers l'échafaud," since that would be "donner sa vie deux fois" (I, p. 324); and Dora concludes her reasoning with the assurance that, in this way, "nous payons plus que nous ne devons."

By paying more than he owes in terms of personal sacrifice, "le juste" places himself above reproach and remains master and judge of his acts. In this way, he also experiences absolute Freedom. As Kaliayev puts it: "Entre l'attentat et l'échafaud . . . il y a toute une éternité" (I, p. 324); and Dora exclaims in defence of her imprisoned Yanek: "Il est libre, il est libre enfin" (V, p. 381). Having fulfilled his mission, the saintly "juste" regains his rights as a human being: "Il a le droit



de faire ce qu'il veut, près de mourir" (V, p. 381). Thus, absolute Justice and absolute Freedom, the ultimate goals of "les justes" prove to be unattainable in a human society, although it may have idealistic tendencies; for, even "les justes" find that they are obliged to do injustice and to compromise their extreme attitudes for the sake of their system, "l'Organisation." Absolute Justice remains ideal and, by definition, cannot be made a reality. Any system of Justice, raised to absolute power, must also by its very nature become rigid, inhuman and finally unjust. Skouratov, the head of the state police, seems to have known, at the beginning of his career, this incongruity between Justice as an ideal and Justice as a functional system. He sets out on his mission of winning Kaliayev for the established system with the resigned and still somewhat bitter remark: "On commence par vouloir la justice et on finit par organiser la police" (IV, p. 365).

Skouratov's remark also indicates another relationship between the Justice that he represents and the one that "les justes" are trying to enforce: the one becomes as unjust as the other when it is systematized, and, consequently becomes simply an impersonal, inhuman, automatically functioning set of rules. In addition, both kinds of justice run the risk of becoming dominated by a small group (the archduke and his officers, on the one hand, the revolutionary socialist Organisation, on the other), and of becoming a subterfuge for men who do not want to





assume responsibility for their acts, or who are incapable of doing so. Thus the condemned hangman Foka, accepting his judges and their judgement with the same forgone conclusion as the division of humanity into "barine" and "pauvre diable", transfers responsibility for his acts to others. In prison, he explains to Kaliayev that his executions "ne sont pas des crimes, puisque c'est commandé" (IV, p. 363). Stepan, too, tries to escape his sense of personal responsibility when he says with regard to the contemplated assassination of the archduke's niece and nephew: "Je le pourrais si l'Organisation le commandait" (II, p. 335).

There is still another similarity between the state of injustice in tzarist Russia and the state of injustice which "les justes" dream of building: both are based on a belief in a future "paradise". In the feudalistic tzarist society, the common people are taught to believe in "paradise" as a beautiful, happy state of being, their reward, after their death and God's infallible Last Judgement, for having suffered the human imperfections and injustices of the present state. Thus, Foka, the "representative" of Russia's common people automatically recognizes Kaliayev's sketch of his ideal, the state of absolute Justice: "Oui, c'est le royaume de Dieu" (IV, p. 361). But Kaliayev, who has according to Stepan "l'âme religieuse" (III, p. 355), angrily rejects this traditional concept of religion and sums up his own, revolutionary ideas on the relation of God to men with the following rigorous



statement: "Dieu ne peut rien. La justice est notre affaire!" (IV, p. 361). When Foka does not seem to understand, Kaliayev illustrates with the legend of Saint Dmitri his belief that God and Justice are two separate matters and, further, that living men have to tend to their own matters, that is, to Justice in this world, before they should tend to God. Yanek's conclusion of the legend seems to suggest a parallel between the Saint's destiny and that of "les justes," who all give up their personal rights and desires in order to bring about a paradisial state of Love and Justice: "Et alors, il y a ceux qui arriveront toujours en retard au rendez-vous parce qu'il y a trop de charrettes embourbées et trop de frères à secourir" (IV, p. 362).

Although Kaliayev does not believe that his ideal state of Justice is attainable within his and his "brothers'" life-time, he does believe that this state will become a reality, through their sacrifices, within the nearer future; otherwise, he would not be willing to make such sacrifices. As he himself puts it: "Et pour une cité lointaine, dont je ne suis pas sûr, je n'irai pas frapper le visage de mes frères. Je n'irai pas ajouter à l'injustice vivante pour une justice morte" (II, p. 339). This statement by Kaliayev is directed against Stepan, whose totalitarian demand for absolute Justice in lieu of God shows that his ideal has become so abstract that it has lost contact with life and that, finally, its rigid lifeless rule brings death to all





its subjects. Stepan calls for such an absolute justice because, as he says, "pour nous qui ne croyons pas à Dieu, il faut toute la justice ou c'est le désespoir" (II, p. 355). Against that view stands Kaliayev, for whom, according to Dora, "la justice elle-même est désespérante" (III, p. 355) and for whom, in his own words, "vivre est une torture puisque vivre sépare" (IV, p. 375). Thus, for Kaliayev as well as for Dora true happiness is possible only through withdrawal from the intrusive injustices of present life, through the return to a paradisiacal state of innocence that only the forsaking of life can bring. That is why they wish to die on the scaffold, martyrs and saints of their pure ideal or, using their own terminology, innocent "justes."



### CHAPTER III

#### FRIEDRICH DURRENMATT'S ROMULUS DER GROSSE

In his "Anmerkung zu Romulus," Dürrenmatt describes the hero of his first theatre-production (1949) as "[einen] als Narren verkleideten Weltenrichter."<sup>1</sup> In the first two acts of the play, Romulus is shown as he had appeared to his people during the twenty years of his reign, "ein Zyniker und ewig verfressener Hanswurst" (III, p. 51). In the third act it appears, however, that Romulus' real nature is that of the "Weltenrichter," who played the fool only to be able to execute, undisturbed, the death sentence which he had passed on his empire. Finally, in the fourth act, Romulus himself is judged, in turn, by the world beyond the empire that he condemned. And the climax of the play's tragicomic aspect as well as that of Romulus' fate "[liegt] genau in der Komödie seines Endes, in der Pensionierung . . . dieses kaiserlichen Hühnerzüchters, dieses als Narren verkleideten Weltenrichters" (Anmerkung, p. 79); for, Romulus allows his people

<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Komödien I, (Zürich, Arche Verlag, 1957), Anmerkung, p. 79. Throughout my text, this edition has been used for all quotations and references. Roman numerals indicate the acts of the play which is not divided into scenes.





to be executed on the assumption that he himself will also be executed by the German invaders, thus bringing the Roman Empire to its final end. But the invaders refuse to kill Romulus; instead, they sentence him to a life of comfortable retirement, and, by accepting his sentence, Romulus accepts the fact that he was a fool in making his own judgement so absolute.

\* \* \*

The Rome inherited by Romulus had become a "Weltenreich . . . und damit eine Einrichtung, die öffentlich Mord, Plünderung, Unterdrückung und Brandschätzung auf Kosten der anderen Völker betrieb" (III, p. 51)--this, for Romulus, is the terrible "Truth" of his country's history, and, at the same time, the subject and setting of the tragicomic play which his life is to become. Romulus judged his imperialistic country to be guilty of historical crime. Since he was also convinced that "das römische Weltreich besteht seit Jahrhunderten nur noch, weil es einen Kaiser gibt" (III, p. 51), he resolved "selbst Kaiser zu werden, um das Imperium liquidieren zu können" (III, p. 51).

Thus, judgement and condemnation of the Roman empire's history mark the moral beginning of Romulus' twenty years of "anti-government." In reality, Romulus' reign starts with his marriage to Julia, for he contracted it solely for the sake of his "mission." As he himself says plainly in his last conversation with Julia:



Ich habe dich geheiratet, um Kaiser zu werden, und du hast mich geheiratet, um Kaiserin zu werden. Du bist meine Frau geworden, weil ich vom höchsten römischen Adel abstamme und du die Tochter des Kaisers Valentinianus und einer Sklavin bist. Ich habe dich legitimiert und du mich gekrönt. (III, p. 49)

The same Romulus who feels so strongly about the historical trespasses of his people seems to have fewer scruples about his own personal ethic, for, as he explains to Julia in the same dialogue: "Ich habe nie das Verbrechen begangen, dich einen Tag darüber im Zweifel zu lassen, weshalb ich dich zur Frau nahm" (III, p. 49). He seems to find adequate justification for his strictly functional marriage in his pronounced honesty and conscious avoidance of concealment. A similar reasoning seems to be his justification for the role of liquidator he assumes for his empire.

Having all but liquidated his empire and convinced of his own imminent death, Romulus reveals his deep purpose to his daughter Rea: "Ich habe mich ein Leben lang darin geübt . . ., furchtlos das Richtige zu tun" (III, p. 55). Thus, he must consider this marriage of convenience that made him emperor to have been "das Richtige"; in the same way, "das Richtige" justifies his refusal to govern during the following twenty years of his reign. And he agrees with his wife, when she says that during his reign he has "nichts anderes getan als gegessen, getrunken, geschlafen, gelesen und Hühner gezüchtet" (III, p. 50).

During his entire reign, Romulus lives a natural, human life,





rather than the formal life of the Emperor, an abstract figure-head. Apparently, to him, his is the only right way to live and, unfortunately, it is precisely this respect for the natural and the human which the imperialistic Romans, in his opinion, have offended and lost. What the Emperor later calls "die uralte Schuld unserer Geschichte" (III, p. 61), is nothing else than the Roman Empire's offence, throughout the centuries, against the rights of other peoples, or, more generally, against the rights of humanity and nature. For Romulus, human and natural values must come first, particularly before such an abstract idea as "Vaterland." To Rea he says: "Man soll es [das Vaterland] weniger lieben als einen Menschen"; and he adds this piece of advice: "Man soll vor allem gegen sein Vaterland misstraurisch sein. . . [denn] Vaterland nennt sich der Staat immer dann, wenn er sich anschickt, auf Menschenmord auszugehen" (III, pp. 53-54). Similarly, Romulus' down-grading of the horseman Spurius Titus Mama's heroic long-distance ride, "damit Rom lebe" (I, p. 32), to the level of an extraordinary "sportliche Leistung" (I, p. 15) also originates in his aversion for preconceived and essentially empty ideals. Be human, Romulus urges the horseman when he pleads: "Geh schlafen, Präfekt", for "die heutige Zeit" (the time in which at least one person is aware of Rome's historical guilt and hypocritical demeanor) "hat dein Heldentum in eine Pose verwandelt!" (I, p. 32).



For Romulus, the term "Vaterland" is a euphemism, the heroic act for the "Vaterland" a pose, and he considers both as signs of a decaying culture, since they serve to conceal or embellish an immoral, unnatural and inhuman fact, act or purpose. Romulus, whose aim in life is "furchtlos das Richtige zu tun" (III, p. 55), sees the real danger of his society's standards and rules of conduct in their becoming the Roman's second nature and, finally, supplanting his original, human nature. As a result, Romulus strives to liberate from prescribed, formal conduct not only himself, but, logically, everyone else as well. His "einzige Leidenschaft . . . die Hühnerzucht" (II, p. 33) originates in and represents his consuming effort to return to the "natural" life. His proposition "für einen praktischen, realisierbaren Wahlspruch. Zum Beispiel: Für Hühnerzucht und Landwirtschaft" in lieu of "Für Sklaverei und Gott" (I, pp. 24-25) illustrates this basic relationship of Romulus' ideal to his condemnation of the Empire.

Since the Romans' ancient guilt consists of their interference with the natural course of history and their denaturalization of human ways and values, Romulus, in his pursuit of "das Richtige," decides on political inaction (which, in view of the approaching German armies, is the same as anti-political action), thus giving history the chance, as he believes, to resume its natural course. Meanwhile, in private life, the Emperor





spends his time at chicken-farming, a natural occupation for the good of humanity, and abolishing imperial formalities.

However, Romulus' neglect of his functions as ruler results--and, indeed is intended to do so--in the dissolution of the Roman Empire. His exemplary, naturally human way of life is, therefore, meant to be a wishful preview of the new society. His position as emperor is not for Romulus an encouragement to be a leader or reformer to his country, but an opportunity to be its judge, jury and executioner. In his last controversy with his wife, he openly declares himself to be "Roms Richter" (III, p. 52), and, in his heart-to-heart talk with the Germanic prince Odoaker, he confesses: "Ich richtete Rom hin, weil ich seine Vergangenheit fürchtete" (IV, p. 74). Thus, Romulus judges and condemns the Romans for their offence, throughout history, against humanity; and he executes them, because only their deaths will deliver them from their past and, at the same time, bring redemption from their sin and guilt. It is in order to regain the innocence of an original, natural, human state--the life of Rome before its "Fall" or degeneration into a "Weltreich"--that Romulus sacrifices his people by surrendering them to the mercy of cruel historical change: in this case, the invasion by the Germans: "Ich verlangte von meinem Lande ein ungeheures Opfer," he says in his confession to Odoaker, "ich liess das Blut meines Volkes fliessen, indem ich es wehrlos machte . . ." (IV, p. 72).



Hence, Romulus' political negligence is his method of disabling his people in order to lead them all the surer to their inevitable destruction, which should bring about their redemption and resurrection in some distant, new society, like that before the "Fall" of Rome. Of course, no one realizes the method behind the Emperor's inaction and apparent madness. His own wife believes the cause of his conduct to be simply "Faulheit" (III, p. 50); the heroic horseman sees behind it "einen schändlichen Kaiser" (I, p. 32); and, as the representative of the Emperor's soldiers who disdainfully call their master "Romulus den Kleinen" (II, p. 44), Amilian judges the emperor to be impotent and destructive, maybe "wahnsinnig," as Julia also fears (III, p. 51), and he concludes: "Dieser Kaiser muss weg" (II, p. 46). When Amilian attempts to assassinate Romulus, he is surprised by the Emperor who calmly calls him to account, and Amilian asks in return: "Und wie willst du dich rechtfertigen: Du bist angeklagt, dein Reich verraten zu haben" (III, p. 60). The supreme judge stands himself accused. But Romulus' justification vis-à-vis Amilian rejects his own guilt and frees him from the judgement of others:

Nicht ich habe mein Reich verraten, Rom hat sich selbst verraten. Es kannte die Wahrheit, aber es wählte die Gewalt, es kannte die Menschlichkeit, aber es wählte die Tyrannei. Es hat sich doppelt erniedrigt: Vor sich selbst und vor den anderen Völkern, die in seine Macht gegeben waren. (III, p. 60)

However, whereas the beginning of Romulus' defence gives the impression of an attempt to turn the accusation back onto his





accuser, in order to remove himself entirely from the blame, the continuation of his defence here makes it clear that he feels himself part of the Roman Empire which he condemns: "Wir haben fremdes Blut vergossen, nun müssen wir mit dem eigenen zurückzahlen. . . . Haben wir noch das Recht, uns zu wehren? Haben wir noch das Recht, mehr zu sein als ein Opfer?" (III, p. 61). By speaking in the first person plural of Rome's historic guilt, Romulus shows that he does not deny his part of this heritage. On the contrary, he apparently feels himself to be the foremost among the guilty heirs when he says: "Weiche nicht vor meiner Majestät zurück, die sich vor dir erhebt, mit der uralten Schuld unserer Geschichte übergossen . . ." (III, p. 61). Indeed, this position is only the logical continuation of his early conviction: "Das römische Weltreich besteht seit Jahrhunderten nur noch, weil es einen Kaiser gibt" (III, p. 51). And he now is the Emperor, the incarnation of his "fallen" Empire.

Romulus knows that he is the first and only Roman who recognizes the guilt of his people and who is willing to "pay" for it with the sacrifice of his own life. But the fact that he has condemned all of his subjects to death, that he intends also to sacrifice their lives in order to make them, too, pay for their common historic crime, shows that Romulus sees himself as a supreme judge in the service of an absolute, religious ideal. "Ich opfere Rom, indem ich mich selbst opfere," is the explana-



tion and justification of his acts that the Emperor gives to his daughter Rea. The cool logic of this statement rests on a base of selfrighteousness. Apparently, Romulus believes not only that one death can be "paid" for with another but also that the free sacrifice of his own life, for the sake of his obsession with historical justice, justifies all the other deaths which he has decreed--the deaths of countless subjects whom he deliberately exposes to the invading armies.

"Die Germanen werden mich töten. Ich habe immer mit diesem Tode gerechnet," (III, p. 55) Romulus declares. Here is the secret of his life that enables him, unaffected, to face pain and the death of his fellow-men. "Der Kaiser sieht, aber der Kaiser weicht nicht," (II, p. 46) is his dry, indifferent comment when Amilian, in despair lays bare the physical mutilations which he suffered as a result of his Emperor's seeming political inadequacy. However, Romulus' imperturbability derives not **just** from his self-righteous conviction that the historical guilt of Rome, which he is so conscious of bearing, is necessarily more appalling than any one man's suffering and death. It also comes from his awareness of his own, anticipated martyr-death. His reply to the news of the death of his beloved daughter and her fiancé is a mixture of self-righteousness and "happy martyrdom": "Die Germanen werden mich töten. Noch heute. So kann mich kein Schmerz mehr treffen. . . . Nie war ich gefasster, nie war ich heiterer als





nun, da alles vorüber ist" (IV, p. 65).

However, Romulus discovers to his dismay that his calculation, like that of his wife's regarding their marriage (III, p. 51) is false. He does not achieve the total consummation of his Empire: there is a remainder, namely himself. The Germans arrive, but they do not kill him as he had expected and hoped. On the contrary, their leader Odoaker, salutes Romulus as "[einen] wahren Menschen . . . [einen] gerechten Menschen" (IV, p. 72) and begs the Emperor to accept his surrender; for, while Romulus has been horrified by his people's past conduct in their service to grandiose, dehumanizing ideals, Odoaker fears the same future development in his people, unless he, as Romulus had done, can stop them. Thus, both sovereigns learn in their encounter that they have both been subject to illusion, or as Romulus expresses their disillusionment: "Wir liessen uns von zwei Gespenstern bestimmen" (IV, p. 74). They recognize that, despite all their good intentions to serve humanity by being human themselves, they have both sacrificed many human lives to no avail, because in their passion for absolute justice among peoples, they have thought only in terms of a past or future state of ideal justice, while ignoring the present over which alone man has power. Romulus, in his own words, "wollte Schicksal spielen" and Odoaker, "das [seine] vermeiden" (IV, p. 74). Both have failed in the gigantic task that they set for themselves, but they have gained a new



greatness in recognizing and accepting the fact that they must comply with fate. For Romulus this means, as he says: "Ich muss nun . . . die Gegenwart, an die wir nicht gedacht haben und an der wir beide scheitern . . . in der Pensionierung durchleben, eine Tochter, die ich liebte, einen Sohn, eine Gattin, viele Unglückliche auf dem Gewissen." Odoaker accepts his fate when he adds in resignation: "Und ich werde regieren müssen" (IV, p. 75). Thus, the final act of their judgement-play (Romulus' resignation to the imperial throne and the acceptance of a pension provided by his successor and supposed enemy, and Odoaker's coronation), in which they play "zum letzten Male Komödie," doing so "als ginge die Rechnung hienieden auf, als siegte der Geist über die Materie Mensch" (IV, p. 75), is a proof of their newly won wisdom and mature "Menschlichkeit."





## CHAPTER IV

### FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMATT'S DIE EHE DES HERRN MISSISSIPPI

Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi is Friedrich Dürrenmatt's second comedy (1952). In it the author demonstrates, as says one of his characters in the play, "was sich beim Zusammenprall bestimmter Ideen mit Menschen ereignet, die diese Ideen wirklich ernst nehmen und mit kühner Energie, mit rasender Tollheit und mit einer unerschöpflichen Gier nach Vollkommenheit zu verwirklichen trachten" (I, p. 116).<sup>1</sup> Absolute Justice is the idea that possesses the main character of the play, the State's Attorney, Florestan Mississippi. Since the other characters represent other absolute ideals, such as leadership, communism, and love, their encounter with Mississippi means the confrontation of these absolute ideals with the concept of absolute Justice.

In this chapter, I shall first analyze the character and meaning of Justice for Mississippi, and then Justice as it is seen by the other figures of the play, including the place that

<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Komödien I, (Zürich, Arche Verlag, 1957), pp. 80-158. This edition has been used for all quotations and references in my analysis. It is the second version of the text among the several that Dürrenmatt has written. The Roman numerals refer to the two parts of the play.



they attribute to it in the pursuit of their own obsessions.

\* \* \*

Florestan Mississippi, who calls himself at the beginning of the play "den ersten Juristen der Welt" (I, p. 106), has, as it turns out later, a shady past. He was born in the gutter, knowing neither father nor mother, and he would probably not have survived the extreme poverty of his youth, if he had not discovered in the Bible the spiritual nourishment that was henceforth to sustain and direct his life. Mississippi himself explains this spiritual phenomenon to his childhood-companion Louis, who becomes later his spiritual and political opponent with the pompous name of Frédéric René Saint-Claude:

Wozu hätte ich denn dieses ungeheure Elend geduldet, wenn mir nicht in einer nassen Kellerecke eine halbvermoderte Bibel in die Hände gefallen wäre, in der ich lesen lernte, nächtelang, steifgefroren im Schein der Gaslaternen? Wäre ich einen Tag länger am Leben geblieben, wenn mich nicht die Vision des Gesetzes wie ein Feuermeer überflutet hätte, welches in unsere Finsternisse schoss, so dass von diesem Augenblick an alles, was ich tat, die tiefste Erniedrigung und das gemeinste Verbrechen, nur dem Ziele galt, in Oxford zu studieren, um als Staatsanwalt das Gesetz Mosis wieder einzuführen, getrieben von der Erkenntnis, dass die Menschheit dreitausend Jahre zurückgehen muss, um wieder vorwärts zu kommen? (I, p. 112)

Mississippi succeeds not only in becoming the State's Attorney, but also, to a certain degree, in re-introducing Mosaic law.

Before his marriage to Anastasia, he had personally upheld this law with two hundred death sentences, while during their marriage,





which was contracted "im Namen des Gesetzes Mosis" (II, p. 150), Mississippi succeeds in raising the number of his death sentences, obtained in the name of the Mosaic law, to three hundred and fifty. Consequently, Mississippi considers his marriage to Anastasia a success, professionally and morally. "Ich bin nur ein vollkommen sittlicher Mensch" (I, p. 100) is Mississippi's retort to Anastasia's shocked exclamation "Sie sind wahnsinnig" (I, p. 100), when he reveals to her his determination to re-enforce the Old Testament law. In the continuation of the same speech, Mississippi explains to Anastasia, whom he had just brought to confess the murder of her first husband, that his poisoning his first wife was a logical necessity under the law of Moses, and that their marriage, under the same law, would be "ein Triumph der Gerechtigkeit" (I, p. 102):

Unser Zivilgestzbuch ist, verglichen mit dem Gesetz des Alten Testaments, das für den Ehebruch den Tod beider Schuldigen vorschreibt, ein purer Hohn. Aus diesem heiligen Grunde war die Ermordung meiner Frau eine absolute Notwendigkeit. Ich habe mich durch diesen Schritt bewusst gegen die heutigen Gesetze vergangen. Für dieses Vergehen muss ich bestraft werden, auch wenn meine Motive lauter wie Quellenwasser sind. Doch bin ich gezwungen, in dieser unwürdigen Zeit, selbst mein Richter zu sein. Ich habe das Urteil gefällt. Ich habe mich verurteilt, Sie zu heiraten. (I, p. 100)

Anastasia's first husband and Mississippi's first wife were guilty of adultery with one another. Anastasia then poisoned her husband in an act of passionate revenge; her only explanation and justification is her deceived love; hers is clearly a crime



of passion: "Wir haben uns geliebt, er hat mich betrogen und dann habe ich ihn getötet" (I, p. 97). Mississippi also put to death his spouse, in the same manner as Anastasia had killed her husband: "Ich habe meine Frau auch mit dem gleichen zuckerähnlichen Gift getötet . . . wie Sie ihren Gatten" (I, p. 99). No wonder that Anastasia concludes from this confession: "Sie haben getötet und ich habe getötet. Wir sind beide Mörder" (I, p. 99). However, Mississippi vehemently objects to this equalization:

Nein gnädige Frau. Ich bin kein Mörder. Zwischen Ihrer Tat und der meinen ist ein unendlicher Unterschied. Was Sie aus einem grauenvollen Trieb getan haben, tat ich aus sittlicher Einsicht. Sie haben Ihren Mann hingerichtet und ich mein Weib hingerichtet. (I, p. 99)

Thus, according to Mississippi, Anastasia is a murderer for selfish reasons while he is judge and executioner in the name of an absolute pure ideal. Consequently, Anastasia can feel a personal satisfaction when she learns that her deed made her rival, Mississippi's first wife, suffer: "Ich habe erreicht, was ich wollte. Ich traf sie mitten ins Herz! Sie hat gestöhnt, gerast, geweint, geschrien! Sie zahlte mir jede Sekunde ihrer Lust tausendfach mit Verzweiflung zurück!" (I, p. 97). And, the exuberance of her satisfaction in the effectiveness of her cruel, personal justice climaxes in the exclamation: "Ich würde sie [diese Tat] immer wieder tun" (I, p. 98). Mississippi, on the other hand, can find satisfaction only in so far as the Mosaic law concerning adulterers has been fulfilled through Anastasia's act of murder and his own





"execution." Still, Mississippi's satisfaction in the capital punishment of the two adulterers is overshadowed by his knowledge that he as well as Anastasia have offended the laws of their present society. Since, however, the laws "in dieser unwürdigen Zeit," are, "verglichen mit dem Gesetz des Alten Testaments" that he represents, "ein purer Hohn" (I, p. 100), Mississippi feels compelled, in a sadistic and masochistic drive for punishment, to be his and Anastasia's personal judge; and the worst punishment that he can think of for the two of them is their marriage, which he desires, as he says, "um uns endlos foltern zu können," for, "unsere Ehe würde für beide Teile die Hölle bedeuten!" (I, p. 101).

The differences in guilt and punishment are subtle. While Anastasia, in Mississippi's eyes and in the light of Mosaic law is a guilty criminal, he is, because of his ideal, comparatively innocent (his motives being "lauter wie Quellenwasser") and guilty only in the eyes of the contemporary society which he has already judged in toto, as being guilty, too--guilty, of having changed Mosaic law to a less strict concept of justice. While Mississippi is the judge of his age and fellow-men, no one is to judge him but himself: representing "den ersten Juristen der Welt" (I, p. 106), he finds himself "gezwungen, selbst [sein] Richter zu sein" (I, p. 100). Yet, this supreme judge wants, masochistically, to be judged and punished, to suffer in the worst hell of his imagination: the conjugal association with a wife whom



he deems more guilty than himself.

Thus, the State's Attorney, Florestan Mississippi, summons Anastasia, the husband-poisoner, in a private trial and "im Namen der absoluten Sittlichkeit" (I, p. 101) to be his wife; for, he argues: "Wir müssen radikale Mittel anwenden, wenn wir uns sittlich heben wollen, gnädige Frau. Sie sind jetzt eine Mörderin, ich werde Sie durch unsere Ehe in einen Engel verwandeln" (I, p. 101). Thus, the two murderers of their former marital partners engage into a second marriage of five years duration which is hell for both of them. However, while Anastasia feels this period only to be a psychological martyrdom imposed on her by her sadistically inclined second husband, whom she openly calls an "Ungeheuer" (II, p. 120), Mississippi, who in retrospection calls his second marriage "ein fürchterliches Experiment" (II, p. 154), feels satisfied about it in the end, believing firmly: " . . . dass [seine] Ehe . . . [sie] beide, [seine] Frau und [sich], entschieden läuterte" (I, p. 103).

Obviously, to Mississippi his marriage to Anastasia is his own personal experiment, conceived partly in order to prove the theory "dass nur ein peinlich befolgtes Gesetz den Menschen zu einem besseren, ja höheren Wesen zu machen imstande sei" (I, p. 104). Therefore, he demands of guilty Anastasia not only to assist at the executions for which he fights in his office as state's attorney, but also to comfort the imprisoned before their





execution, as well as to obey what Anastasia calls "die kompliziertesten Vorschriften und die absurdesten Bestimmungen . . . bloss weil sie im Gesetz Mosis stehn" (II, p. 125). Mississippi, looking back over the five years of his second marriage, believes that there is enough of a moral change in his wife to consider his theory tested and proved:

Meine Frau vertiefte--wie vorausgesehen--ihren Charakter erklecklich und wurde auch religiösen Gefühlen gegenüber positiver. . . . der tägliche Besuch im Zuchthaus, der ihr bald zu einem Herzensbedürfnis wurde, erfüllte sie mit immer neuer Hilfsbereitschaft, so dass man sie allgemein den Engel der Gefängnisse nannte. (I, p. 104)

He firmly believes that Anastasia, under the influence of the law of Moses, was transformed into an angel, as he had prophesied at the beginning of his marriage; the proof for him is that she became, as he says, "ein Engel der Gefängnisse, auch von denen geliebt, die ich zum Tode verurteilt habe" (II, p. 137).

Since Mississippi, who considers himself as being "tief religiös" (I, p. 98), believes that "man kann die Gerechtigkeit nicht ändern" (I, p. 107), and since, therefore, the first law in Christian tradition, the law of Moses, for him must be the original, the absolute Law, the reformatory effect that the meticulous pursuit of this absolute Law supposedly has on its followers must be just as absolute as the Law itself. Herein lies his own feeling of superior righteousness and innocence. Thus, Anastasia's radical transformation from the adulterous murderer, whom he took for wife, into an angel, in Mississippi's eyes could



be only the result of the severe law-of-Moses ruling that he had imposed on their marriage. That is why Mississippi can reply, without hesitation or doubt, to Graf Bodo von Ubelohe-Zabernsee, whose confession of love for Anastasia means, to Mississippi, the same as accusing his "angelic" wife of adultery: "Ich glaube an sie, [Anastasia] wie ich an das Gesetz glaube" (II, p. 137). However, Mississippi's certainty about his theory that the absolute pursuit of an absolute ideal leads finally to total identification with the absolute ideal itself becomes of prime concern, because of its implications, when Ubelohe insists on the sinfulness of the "Engel":

Du Narr . . . dem ich nun die Wahrheit ins Gesicht schleudere. Was liebst du ein Weib um seiner Werke willen? Weist du nicht, dass die Menschenwerke lügen? Wie kleingläubig ist deine Liebe, wie blind ist dein Gesetz, denn sieh, ich liebe diese Frau nicht als eine Gerechte, ich liebe sie als eine Unglückliche. (II, p. 137)

From here on, Mississippi's primary concern shifts from the supposed identification of the object with its ideal, the guilty human beings with absolute Justice, to the proof of this theory's implications, which he had attributed, in an a priori manner, to the effects of the Law in practice. Just as the use of radical means, i.e. any means, seemed permissible to the state's attorney in his attempt "die Menschen zu . . . besseren, ja . . . höheren Wesen zu machen" (I, p. 104), so now he feels equally justified in using any means, the most radical means, in order to probe Anastasia's apparently angelic nature: after his dismissal from





his position as state's attorney for political reasons and the consequent "Zusammenbruch [seiner] wahrhaft gigantischen Bemühungen, die Welt von Grund aus durch das Gesetz Mosis zu restaurieren" (I, p. 103), Mississippi poisons Anastasia and makes her swear "bei den Toten, zu denen [sie] jetzt gehört" (II, p. 152), "beim Gesetz, in dessen Namen [er selbst] dreissig Jahre lang getötet [hat]" (II, p. 153), "um die Wahrheit zu wissen" (II, p. 152). For he must know whether she is "ein Engel oder ein Teufel" (II, p. 151). Mississippi's concern for Anastasia's morality derives not so much from a sympathetic personal interest as from an interest in positive knowledge about the ideal to which he has subordinated his entire life. His last desperate questions before Anastasia's death reveal this concern:

Dann ist das Gesetz nicht sinnlos? Dann ist es nicht sinnlos, dass ich getötet habe? Nicht sinnlos, diese Kriege, diese Revolutionen, die sich häufen, die sich zu einem einzigen Trompetenstoss des Todes verdichten? Dann ändert sich der Mensch, wenn er gestraft wird? Dann hat das Jüngste Gericht einen Sinn? (II, p. 153)

Now the main purpose of Mississippi's marital experiment is clear: it was for him an opportunity to experience on a small scale what corrupt, modern society had refused him on a grand scale. Thus, the life and fate of Anastasia was for Mississippi a test-case in which he had hoped desperately to prove the proposition to which he had dedicated his entire life: the severe punishment prescribed by Mosaic law can lead man to an ideal state of morality here on earth. It is the irony of his tragic fate that Mississ-



issippi himself dies with the illusion of Anastasia's moral improvement, but that illusion is possible only because she had the courage to the very end to lie to him and deceive him. And he remains deceived, for, basing his judgement on another absolute a priori principle, he considers such deception to be humanly impossible. "Meine Frau hat nicht gelogen. Sie war keine Ehebrecherin" (II, p. 153), he states categorically over his second wife's dead body, for, he reasons: "Kein Mensch kann lügen, wenn er so stirbt wie sie" (II, p. 154).

In his function as State's Attorney, Mississippi is in a position to exert legally a great deal of influence on the jurisdiction of his country, particularly as long as its government feels that "ein scharfer Kurs im Strafvollzug . . . ganz nützlich [sei]" (I, p. 105). It is the minister of Justice, an early friend of Mississippi, who points out to him that his passion for severe punishment has been temporarily desirable because "es galt die politischen Morde zu bestrafen und die Ordnung wieder herzustellen" (I, p. 105). With that done, the established government repeatedly recommends moderation to Mississippi in order to return to a kind of jurisdiction that would steal from the opposition one of its main objections. Mississippi, however, inexorably carries on with his endeavour to re-enforce the law of Moses; and, since he dares to declare publicly, "man sollte das Gesetz Mosis wieder einführen" (I, p. 106), his "Amtsführung,"





according to the minister, "hat uns [den Staat] in der ganzen westlichen Welt hoffnungslos lächerlich gemacht" (I, p. 105).

The minister and his government feel that Mississippi, as State's Attorney, is politically "nicht mehr tragbar" (I, p. 106). Consequently, the president demands his resignation. When this demand is transmitted to him by his former friend Diego, the present minister of Justice, Mississippi and the minister have a heart-to-heart talk about the principles of Justice.

Diego, true to his position as minister of Justice, advances the pragmatic opinion: "Ich muss die Gerechtigkeit danach einschätzen, ob sie politisch tragbar ist oder nicht" (I, p. 107). For Diego, "Justice" means no more than "jurisdiction" and, as such, is not an ideal but rather a tool for the government in power, an efficient tool in preserving rule and order. Accordingly, the minister answers Mississippi's absolute and idealistic assertion, "man kann die Gerechtigkeit nicht ändern," with this disillusioned observation about men and government:

Alles in dieser Welt kann geändert werden, mein lieber Florestan, nur der Mensch nicht. Dies muss man eingesehen haben, um regieren zu können. Regieren heisst steuern, nicht hinrichten. Ideale sind schön und gut, aber ich habe mich an das Mögliche zu halten und ohne sie auszukommen, wenn ich nicht gerade eine Rede halte. Die Welt ist schlecht, aber nicht hoffnungslos, dies wird sie nur, wenn ein absoluter Masstab an sie gerichtet wird. Die Gerechtigkeit ist nicht eine Hackmaschine, sondern ein Abkommen. (I, p. 107)

Frédéric René Saint-Claude, the companion of Mississippi's miserable youth, is the other person with whom the State's Attorney,



defender of the law of Moses, debates the nature of Justice. These two discussions reveal more about Mississippi's nature and beliefs than does the earlier discussion with the Minister of Justice.

Saint-Claude is a staunch communist, one of those "welche die Ideale ernst nehmen, die die Partei zu verkörpern vorgibt" (II, p. 145). He sees as life's task the carrying through of the world revolution, as is proper "für einen richtigen Revolutionär." When he meets Mississippi for the first time since youth, Saint-Claude believes: "Das Spiel steht gut. Die Welt ist als Ganzes unsittlich geworden" because, "die einen fürchten für ihre Geschäfte, die anderen für ihre Macht." From those convictions, Saint-Claude draws the conclusion: "Die Revolution muss sich gegen alle richten" (I, p. 109). Thus, he too makes himself judge of an entire world which he, too, wants to save, but he would save it by subjecting it to the communist absolute ideal of future utopia. Saint-Claude's attitude in the pursuit of this ideal is like Mississippi's that of a militant person. He starts revolutions wherever he can, knowing full well that what he and others like him are doing is murder: "Wir haben . . . Blut vergossen . . . Was wir tun ist Mord . . ." (I, p. 113). However, he believes, as do most extremists, that for the attainment of his absolute ideal he is justified in using any expedient means.

Saint-Claude, in his and Mississippi's poverty-stricken youth, had discovered Marx's Das Kapital, in much the same way





and with the same results as Mississippi's discovery of the Bible: They both put the rest of their lives into full-time service of an absolute ideal of Justice, Saint-Claude serving the revolutionary Marxist ideal of a future communistic brotherhood of men and Mississippi that of a future Christian brotherhood, modelled, however, on the past example of an Old Testament society. Thus, there is a basic similarity in the characters and aspirations of Mississippi and Saint-Claude, despite the seemingly opposite nature of their ideals. Saint-Claude is himself aware of his fundamental likeness to Mississippi, to whom he points out:

Wir sind die zwei letzten Moralisten unserer Zeit.  
Wir sind beide untergetaucht, du in der Maske des  
Henkers, ich in der Maske des Sowjetspions. Wir  
wollten beide Gerechtigkeit. Aber du wolltest  
die Gerechtigkeit des Himmels, und ich die Gerechtig-  
keit der Erde. Du willst eine imaginäre Seele  
retten, und ich einen realen Leib! (I, p. 112)

Mississippi, true to his Christian ideal and shocked by Saint-Claude's bold equation of their ideals, exclaims: "Du bist verrückt! Es gibt keine Gerechtigkeit ohne Gott!" (I, p. 112).

He thereby indicates the superhuman element in his concept of justice that demands a divine law, namely the law of Moses.

Saint-Claude refuses in kind: "Du bist verrückt. Es gibt nur eine Gerechtigkeit ohne Gott"; and he adds the explanation: "Dem Menschen kann nichts anderes helfen als der Mensch" (I, p. 113).

For the communist Saint-Claude, Justice is an essentially human concern, both, in its application as well as in its end. "Wirf



ihn ins Feuer, diesen unmenschlichen Begriff, und du findest die Menschlichkeit, den trunkenen Traum unserer Jugend" (I, p. 113).

Of course, Saint-Claude claims his ideal to be human and for the good of humanity. However, in his fanatic pursuit of it, his ideal becomes just as absolute, abstract, and inhuman as he claims Mississippi's to be. Communism and revolution are only a philosophical camouflage for his own will to power, his desire "sich die ganze Welt zu unterwerfen" (II, p. 147). And, indeed, this will to overpower the world seems to be essentially what these two judges of mankind have in common, for Mississippi too finally remarks: "Ich habe um die Welt gekämpft und gesiegt" (II, p. 154).





## CHAPTER V

### COMPARISON AND CONCLUSION

As different as Camus' dramas may seem from those of Dürrenmatt, their treatment of Justice shows definite similarities and even parallels. A comparison of Camus' Caligula and Les Justes with Dürrenmatt's Romulus der Grosse and Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi seems to bring out most clearly the two writer's common concern with the idea and forms of Justice;<sup>1</sup> for, in fact, considered as a contemporary dramatic form, the "Justice Play," and despite the two playwright's particular attitudes towards dramatic expression, Romulus can be considered as Dürrenmatt's Caligula and the main characters of Mississippi as his "justes."<sup>2</sup> Most obviously, in both Caligula and Romulus, the historical settings and the basic course of action are the same: both are set back

<sup>1</sup>Henceforth, I shall refer to Romulus der Grosse as Romulus, and to Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi as Mississippi.

<sup>2</sup>Camus repeatedly makes himself the proponent of a modern tragedy and considers his dramas as attempts in this direction: see his lecture "Sur l'avenir de la tragédie" (1955) and the two interviews with France-Soir and Paris-Théâtre (1958) that are reprinted in his Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles (Bruges, 1963), pp. 1698-1717. Dürrenmatt, on the other hand, believes: "Uns kommt nur noch die Komödie bei"--see "Theaterprobleme" (1954) in Dürrenmatt's Theater-Schriften und Reden (Zürich, 1966), pp. 92-131.



historically into the Roman Empire and put on centre stage a Roman Emperor whose consuming endeavor is to destroy his own empire. Les Justes and Mississippi have like settings and both develop as a debate of conflicting ideologies around the question of Justice: they are set in modern times and their action is in the conflicts that arise when a person who lives for an ideal of Justice encounters other persons who live for other ideals. All four plays have political backgrounds and, more particularly, backgrounds of political subversion. This political subversion results from the action of the "hero" or "heroes" or from their acting as "supreme judges" in the plays.

Having analyzed in the previous four chapters Caligula, Les Justes, Romulus and Mississippi in terms of Justice, such as it appears in the thoughts, sentiments, and actions of the characters, we can now further define Justice in the drama of Camus and Dürrenmatt in a more systematic manner. This additional step will facilitate comparisons and bring out the implications that these two dramatists' image of Justice may have for the contemporary European theatre. Since the question of Justice is most often raised in all four of the plays when the "hero" assumes the role of "supreme judge," it seems most essential to make the "supreme judge" and "his justice" the focal point of the following examination.

In Mississippi, Dürrenmatt has one of his characters, Graf



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Bodo von Übelohe-Zabernsee, pronounce what was the author's concern when writing the play, namely:

dass es ihm darum ging, zu untersuchen, was sich beim Zusammenprall bestimmter Ideen mit Menschen ereignet, die diese Ideen wirklich ernst nehmen und mit kühner Energie, mit rasender Tollheit und mit einer unerschöpflichen Gier nach Vollkommenheit zu verwirklichen trachten . . . ob der Geist--in irgendeiner Form--imstande sei, die Welt zu ändern . . ." (I, p. 116)

This statement is just as valid for Romulus, Caligula, and Les Justes, for what else are their main characters if not men who have "collided" with ideas or ideals that they really take seriously and which, in a frantic drive for perfection, they try to make reality? Being obsessed and possessed by an idea or ideal is then the basic prerequisite for a character to become a "supreme judge" and, at the same time, it is his most conspicuous characteristic. It is in relation to his consuming ideal that the "supreme judge" judges men and life; and his idea of Justice itself may be his ideal, but not necessarily so. The "supreme judge's" Justice may be in the service of his ideal and even identify fully with it. But in all cases, Justice is presented as a function of idealism. Moreover, the example of Caligula and Kaliayev shows clearly that it is not legal right and judicial power which make a "supreme judge" but rather his personal, ideological attitude towards Justice. Caligula has the legal right to act as "supreme judge" as soon as he becomes Emperor, but he takes advantage of this right only after having decided to dedicate his life to the pursuit of



an ideal--an absolute state of existence. "Les justes" never have the legal right to act as judges and yet they are forced to act so, illegally, in order to fulfil the demands that supposedly will lead to their ideal--a paradisiacal state on earth. In fact, even in the cases of Romulus and Mississippi their position of extraordinary, legal power is not the decisive factor in their becoming "supreme judges." Since Romulus has condemned to death the Roman Empire before becoming Emperor and since Mississippi has already sentenced his society, guilty of deviation from the divine law of the Old Testament, before he holds the position of State's Attorney, both, Romulus and Mississippi, have acted as "supreme judges" previous to their legal position as justiciaries. Indeed, the acquisition of their legal power is for both only the first, though maybe the most important step, in the methodological and practical pursuit of their ideal.

For the "supreme judge," his ideal is the Truth. Consequently, in his eyes, whoever does not subscribe to the same ideal lives in lies and illusions--an intolerable situation for the man to whom the Truth has been revealed. It is precisely because of the universal validity which the "supreme judge" attributes to his Truth that he feels it to be his vocation or mission to make everyone, as Caligula says, "vivre dans la vérité" (I, 4, p. 16). Since the "supreme judge's" goal is the creation of a state in which his absolute Truth rules--"die ganze Wahrheit," as demands Mississippi (I, p. 93),





"un royaume où l'impossible est roi," as Caligula calls it (I, 11, p. 27)--his actions to reach this ideal state must a priori be morally right and justified because the ideal itself is the absolute Truth. Hence, his actions and means to reach his ideal state are, in the eyes of the "supreme judge," just. They constitute Justice. That is why Caligula can ruthlessly sweep away the moral and social values of his present society without assuming any guilt for his actions. He is simply enforcing his ideal which, being absolute, contains no right or wrong. Likewise, Romulus, whose ideal is the "natural" state of Rome before its "Fall," before it became an imperialistic institution suppressing the rights of other peoples, can allow injustice to be done to his people as a means of enforcing his ideal. As such, this injustice takes on the name of Justice.

Identifying himself completely with the absolute rightness of his ideal, and allowing it to dominate his entire life, the "supreme judge" is tempted to expect the same attitude towards his ideal from the people who surround him. However, in practice, the majority of men in the society in which the "supreme judge" lives oppose the Justice that he derives from his ideal. Consequently, the "supreme judge's" pursuit of his ideal necessarily becomes a campaign of "justice by force," a crusade--in the militant sense of the term--for Justice and for the Truth which this Justice serves and with which it often identifies. The resistance of



society to "justice by force" isolates the "supreme judge," pushes him and his ideal further out of reality and into the abstract, forces him to renounce those who do not believe in his ideal, and makes him realize that, in order to achieve his ideal, he will have to use means as absolute as his ideal itself. In practice, these means destroy people as if they were mere obstacles to be removed so that the absolute ideal can reign. Thus, the "supreme judge" when executing his Justice appears totalitarian, inhuman, and destructive to all those who do not believe in his ideal.

All of our "supreme judges" are involved with the political forces of their countries and make use or try to make use of political power to attain their ideal through "justice by force" because political power touches the greatest number of people. The "supreme judges'" success in enforcing their Justice is, therefore, proportional to their success in gaining political power. However, since their Justice is detrimental to the people, their political power becomes a threat to the people's existence, who, in turn, finally threaten the "supreme judge" himself with death. Such is the fate of Caligula, Romulus, and Mississippi, the three "supreme judges" who, because of their exceptional legal and political power, advanced farthest in the pursuit of their destructive ideal; and the same fate would undoubtedly await Stepan, the most radical among the five "justes," if he, too, were to enjoy political power.





Three of these four "Justice Plays" end with the death of their "hero" (or "heroes," as in the case of Mississippi) and the fourth, Romulus, ends with the preservation of the Emperor's life, but only as an unexpected turn of his fate. It may therefore be justified to consider the death or anticipated death of the "supreme judge" as a clue for the interpretation of the authors' intent in expressing their ideas through the "Justice Play"; for, the "supreme judge's" end, his confrontation with his own death, is in all cases remarkably similar in a general way, just as each "hero" became "supreme judge" in similar circumstances. These conditions would point to a similar basic concern of the part of both authors even though their particular motivations remain different.

All of the "supreme judges" embark on their fateful careers by subscribing with their lives to the demands of an ideal. For each of them, there is a definite break with their former life in which they had personal rights and could make demands on others, whereas in the service of their absolute ideal they allow themselves to be enslaved and give up all personal rights. Consequently, they develop a feeling of self-sacrifice, which, in turn, reinforces their belief in the superiority of the ideal. Simultaneously, and especially simultaneously to their increasing hostility toward the people, the "supreme judges" tend to identify themselves more and more with their ideal. It is particularly



through this identification that the "supreme judge" assumes characteristics of a "Christ-figure" who takes upon himself the error and guilt of the "ignorant" and who believes that he can redeem the world through his martyrdom. This is why Caligula calmly awaits his assassins and Romulus the German invaders, why Mississippi and Kaliayev finally give themselves up to the justice of the ruling society. However, since Romulus does not die the way he had planned, nor Mississippi, Dürrenmatt also shows on stage the tragic error of his self-righteous "supreme-judges," who are victims to the worst of all vices, which, in Camus' words, is "celui de l'ignorance qui croit tout savoir et qui s'autorise alors à tuer."<sup>3</sup>

The "supreme judges" in these "Justice Plays" by Camus and Dürrenmatt are fanatic pursuers of absolute ideals. They may have different individual characters and the nature of their individual ideals and Justice may be quite different, yet they all engage paradoxically in injustice, precisely because of their fanaticism, which is the result of an oversimplified "all or nothing" view of the world and thus, a result of ignorance. In these plays, the moral and philosophical problems treated by Camus and Dürrenmatt under the aspect of Justice come out most clearly in the

<sup>3</sup>Albert Camus, La Peste, p. 1324, in Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles (Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1963), pp. 1211-1472.





discussions of the main characters. Camus' position is exposed in the dialogues of Kaliayev and Stepan and in the talk between Kaliayev and the grand duchess. Dürrenmatt's viewpoint is best seen in the discussions of Mississippi with Saint-Claude and Übelohe. Kaliayev and Stepan belong to the same revolutionary group and are both fighting against the present state of Injustice in order to create a state of ideal Justice. However, they differ in their opinions as to the degree to which such a state can be realized. Kaliayev believes in a "justice vivante," and he reproaches Stepan for fighting in the name of a "justice morte," an abstract ideal of utopian Justice. The grand duchess maintains in her talk with Kaliayev that only God is in a position to render true Justice. But Kaliayev remains firm in his belief that "Dieu ne peut rien. La justice est notre affaire!" (IV, p. 361). The discussions of Mississippi, Saint-Claude, and Übelohe reveal many ideas and ideals that parallel those in the triangle Kaliayev, Stepan, and the grand duchess. Mississippi fights for the ideal of a divine Justice, "um die Gerechtigkeit des Himmels" (I, p. 112), and in his fanatic pursuit of this Justice he resembles Stepan, although, Stepan, of course, does not believe in God. Saint-Claude dedicates his life to the enforcement of Justice in the present, to the realization of the "Gerechtigkeit der Erde" (I, p. 112). But unlike Kaliayev, Saint-Claude uses every means to achieve his ideal. Übelohe's ideal is Truth, and more specifically truth-



fulness to himself. His love for men relates him to Kaliayev although he preserves his devotion for God and Kaliayev is religious only in a very broad sense.

In Les Justes, Camus obviously sympathizes with his character Kaliayev. And Ubelohe is the only character in *Mississippi*, "den er [Dürrenmatt] mit ganzer Leidenschaft liebte" (I, p. 116). Thus, these two characters seem to be mouthpieces for their authors in these plays. Both of them portray idealists who oppose extremism. They both believe that it is impossible to judge other people. This view seems to arise in Camus from his somewhat existential certainty that men never have the same experiences and therefore cannot judge one another. Dürrenmatt, on the other hand, implies that men cannot judge one another because they do not have divine knowledge. The two playwrights seem to be advocates of the same moral law which rejects all absolute ideals because they are basically inhuman and destructive. Such ideals justify the sacrifice of living men and live values for the sake of an abstraction in the distant past or future. Their plays show that absolute Justice, derived from various absolute ideals, finally equals absolute Injustice, because it considers all men guilty and punishable in the light of the ideal and thus endeavours to reduce all life to nothing. It is this totalitarian mentality that both dramatists expose.

Camus and Dürrenmatt in these plays show absolute Justice





not only in alliance with politics, but also with morality, religion, and ideologies. They constantly emphasize that in every case such Justice turns into absolute Injustice as soon as it will no longer respect human life. Thus, the common ground on which Camus, the non-believer in God nor ideologies, and Dürrenmatt, the "prodigal son" of Protestantism, is that of a humanist ethic. A call to recognize human limits and to respect human life is then the essential moral of their "Justice Plays." Just as their "heroes" are, more properly speaking, "anti-heroes," and these "Justice Plays" really "anti-Justice Plays" (because the "hero's" Justice is portrayed), the plays of Camus and Dürrenmatt are not nihilistic, as they have been accused of being. To the contrary, they are examples of a "theatre of ideas" in which the human destruction caused by all types of absolute ideals is dramatized as a warning.

Romulus, Les Justes and Mississippi, dating from around 1950, are plays of the immediate post-war period. In their attacks on totalitarianism and various forms of extremism based on ideology, they reflect their historical position. Caligula, written in 1938, already showed the mentality of the ideological extremist. In fact, after its first performance in 1945, it was interpreted as an indictment of current nihilistic ideologies leading to the destruction of mankind. Thus, these "Justice Plays" are closely related to the political experiences of their authors. Since this historical experience is not limited to these two dramatists, it would seem



probable that other French, German, and European dramatists also discuss the same problems in a similar manner. Indeed, as M. Pierre-Henri Simon points out in his article "Albert Camus et la Justice," there is a definite analogy in theme between Sartre's Les Mains Sales (1948) and Camus' Les Justes (1949).<sup>4</sup> And Max Frisch's masquerade Die chinesische Mauer (1946) is also a "Justice Play" that puts on trial, in a parabolic manner, the destructive totalitarian mentality of historical judges.<sup>5</sup>

My own restricted study of Justice in the theatre of Camus and Dürrenmatt has shown that the "supreme judges" of their dramatic works have fixed characteristics, a common mentality, similar arguments, and a common fate. One is therefore tempted to consider the "supreme judge" as a new dramatic type. The study of Justice in the works of other contemporary European dramatists might well reveal that we can consider the "Justice Play" itself as a new form in European theatre.

<sup>4</sup>Pierre-Henri Simon, "Albert Camus et la Justice," in Théâtre et Destin (Paris, 1959), pp. 191-211.

<sup>5</sup>Hildegard Emmel, "Parodie und Konvention: Max Frisch," in Das Gericht in der deutschen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts (Bern, 1963), pp. 120-150.





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